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# In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

February 21, 1999

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David Moberg Reports



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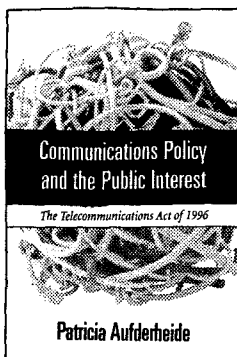
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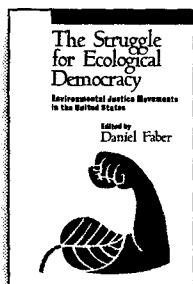
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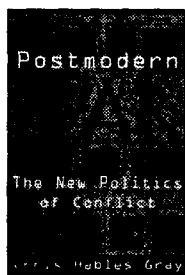
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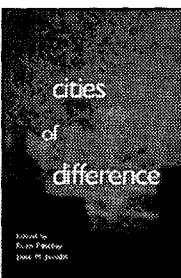
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Cover by Steve Anderson and Terry LaBan

# Letters

## Sooley!

Say it ain't so! Here is *In These Times*, a magazine distinguished by its sophistication in matters political, economic and sociological, praising two of the lousiest programs on television. First, Scott McLemee lauds *King of the Hill*, which, when it is not making fun of hillbilly diction, preaches little clichés like "dumb people have feelings too" ("A Little Respect, Y'all," Nov. 29). Second, David Graeber analyzes the ludicrous *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, which is replete with the teenagers evidently thought necessary to lure an audience these days, vampires to furnish the required frisson, and the supernatural for those who find the real world too much to bear ("Rebel Without a God," Dec. 27). Please make every effort to cease these encomiums to hogwash.

Stewart Benedict  
New York

## Men's Movement?

In David Moberg's article on the Labor Party convention, only men are quoted ("Labor Throws a Party," Dec. 27). I suspect this is the nature of the animal rather than Moberg's predilection. My feminist perception has been that the Labor Party is riddled with really big male egos, a mirror image of the patriarchal Christian Coalition. It hasn't helped that the Labor Party found it difficult to take a stand against forced childbearing, an issue the much-maligned Democrats settled a decade ago.

Moberg also reports a dissatisfaction with the current union strategy of "hitching labor's fortunes" to the Democrats. "Hitching" is the operative word here. Far too many progressives whine about what the Democrats are doing instead of getting in there and fighting for the party's heart and soul.

The Teamsters for a Democratic Union didn't leave to start a new union where, without a doubt, some of them could have been big frogs in a little pond, too. And even the Christian Coalition has sense enough to stay within one of the two major parties in a winner-take-all system.

Mary L. Wentworth  
Amherst, Mass.

## Rwanda Reminder

As much as I appreciate Craig Aaron's interest in the Rwandan genocide ("Holiday Reading," Dec. 27), I hope that neither he nor your readers are misled by the quote from Philip Gourevitch's book that "as far as the political, military and economic interests of the world's power go, [Rwanda] might as well be Mars" and that "when Rwanda had a genocide, the world's powers left Rwanda to it."

The French government was deeply implicated in the poisoning of Rwanda's political climate in the years leading up to the 1994 genocide, providing arms to the Hutu extremists who took power after the fatal plane crash that sparked the killings and protecting those who incited their fellow Rwandans to the thousands of brutal murders that constituted the genocide. Although a recent

French parliamentary report denied the state's involvement in the genocide, many remain unconvinced. No informed observer would deny that France has deep political and commercial interests in Africa's Great Lakes—and indeed throughout the continent.

Aaron rightly emphasizes the meticulous organization of the genocide and the fact that it was above all not an ethnic but a political event. Neither was it an isolated incident in some lost corner of an empty continent. The tragedy is global both in its dimensions and its origins. Aaron underscores the need to remember what happened; but the first step in remembering is understanding.

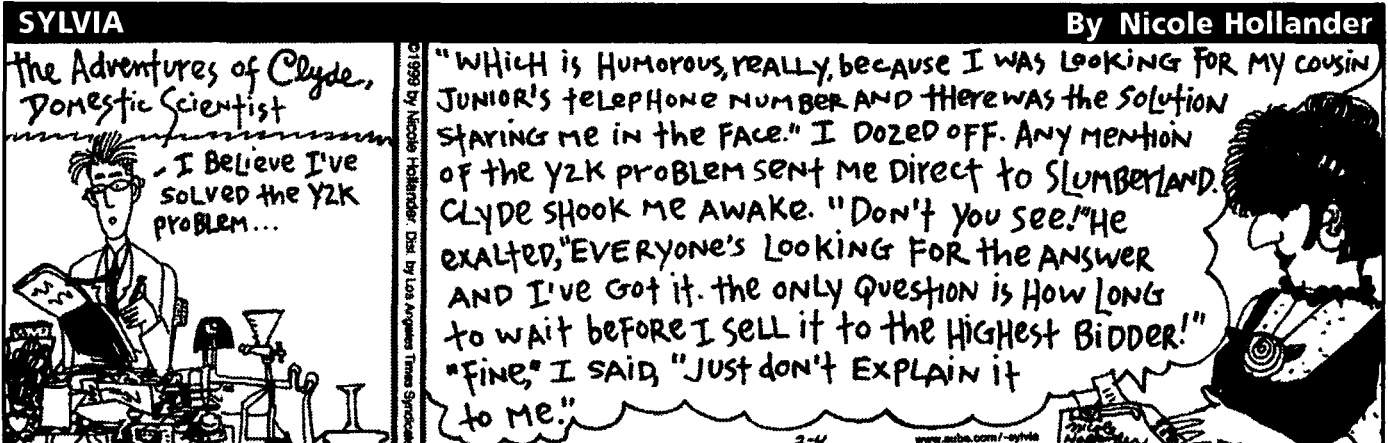
Gregory Mann  
Evanston, Ill.

Craig Aaron responds: Mann is correct that the quote doesn't tell the full story. However, the omission is mine, not Gourevitch's, who explores the French role in the genocide extensively. I strongly recommend that Mann—and everyone else—read the book.

## Correction

Due to an editing error, we incorrectly reported in "Bombs Away!" (Feb. 7) that Kenneth Starr sent his report to the House Judiciary Committee in November. It arrived in September.

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# Beyond the Monica and Bill Show

**T**he impeachment trial playing out in Washington has been a disaster for the Republican Party that may well lead to a Democratic House in 2001. The vast majority of Americans understand that this impeachment has not been about the sanctity of our judicial system. The Republican right has concocted this spectacle, driven by a highly organized core of true believers, threatening any Republican senator who deviates from that party line with a primary challenge in the next election. But that scheme has now come a cropper. Even arch-conservative Pat Robertson has conceded that impeachment is a losing battle.

The impeachment has been a political charade, augmented by Clinton's own incredible irresponsibility and the news media's venal guise as impartial chroniclers of events. The media's pathetic efforts to transmute Rep. Henry Hyde's (R-Ill.) unctuous sows ears into rhetorical silk purses has fooled few. Clinton's approval rating skyrockets as every new act in this soap opera unfolds.

Yet, the "Monica and Bill Show" obfuscates a much more serious and important political drama. President Clinton and the Republican majority have put forth their respective political programs for the coming year. In his State of the Union address, Clinton brilliantly threw bones in all directions. But most of the progressive things he proposed, while belonging in the arena of public debate, were nothing more than smoke screens for a more difficult message: A centrist Democratic is going up against a right-wing Republican Congress, which will result in little, if any, real change in domestic or foreign policy. Whichever way you cut it, the status quo, geared to the needs of large corporations and the super-rich, will remain undisturbed. Lost in the debate—and excluded from the corporate media—is any consideration of alternative policies. Well, not quite.

On the morning before President Clinton delivered his State of the Union message, the Progressive Caucus and the Progressive Challenge presented their own plan. The Progressive Challenge, a project of a national coalition of left-leaning groups, works in tandem with the Progressive Caucus to advance a broad ranging domestic and foreign policy alternative called the Fairness Agenda. Delivered by 10 of the 56 members of the caucus, the Progressive State of the Union provided an antidote to Clinton's homilies and the Republican's verities.

In the address, Rep. Barbara Lee (D-Calif.), pointed out that while the richest Americans' income increased by 30 percent from the late '70s to the mid-'90s, the poorest Americans saw their real incomes shrink by 21

percent. Noting that 20 percent of all American children under 18 live in poverty, she said, "Millions of children are condemned at birth to physical and intellectual underdevelopment because their parents, and more often than not their mothers, are poor." During the remainder of the 106th Congress, she promised, the Progressive Caucus will be "challenging our national priorities to make sure that they put people—working people, poor people and all people—first."

One way to do this is to institute a comprehensive jobs program, said caucus co-chairman Rep. Earl Hilliard (D-Ala.). "We must guarantee that every person who is willing to work has a job, and that everyone who works full-time can live off his or her wages, with a home, sufficient food, health care, the ability to pay for utilities, transportation and education."

Freshman Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.) highlighted the failings of the current health care system, where 43 million Americans are now uninsured—4 million more than in 1994. She proposed expanding Medicare to cover those without health insurance.

**Whichever way you cut it, the status quo, geared to the needs of large corporations and the super-rich, will remain undisturbed.**

To help pay for this expanded government role, Rep. Peter deFazio (D-Ore.), a caucus co-chairman, suggested cutting the military budget. "The Cold War is over," he said, "but Americans are still waiting for their peace dividend. Instead, we are locked into a perpetual arms race with ourselves."

Criticizing Clinton's decision to increase defense spending by \$100 billion over the next six years, deFazio concluded, "The budget for the future is about choices—choices between the insatiably ravenous military industrial complex ... and a healthy, well-housed, well-educated society. Bill Clinton has made the wrong choice."

The Fairness Agenda is an intelligent alternative. In the words of Rep. Lee, it "mobilizes America's abundant resources to build a decent society by cutting military spending and corporate giveaways, instituting fair taxation and redirecting revenues to invest in human resources, such as schools and health care, and in infrastructure such as home building, community development and mass transit."

"The promise of our future is limitless," Clinton said in his State of the Union address. The problem is, until we heed the advice of the Progressive Caucus, the future that Clinton envisions promises more for some than for others.

J.B.

# Left Out in 2000

By Doug Ireland

**M**innesota Sen. Paul Wellstone's decision to abort his presidential candidacy leaves the Democratic Party's enfeebled and inchoate left wing bereft of any contender with an obvious pretension to its leadership for the party's nomination in 2000. Although Wellstone, a wrestler, blamed his withdrawal on his ailing back—which he injured a year ago—there were other, more fundamental flaws that crippled his candidacy. What went wrong?

Just a week before he endorsed the Clinton-ordered carpet-bombing of Iraq known as "Wag the Dog II," Wellstone trundled down *Air Force One's* gangplank on a presidential visit to Israel. The trip symbolized the contradictions in his rationale for running. Although he had, after the 1996 campaign's Donorgate scandal, sometimes referred to the "hostile takeover" of his party by corporate America, Wellstone could not bring himself to make a clean break with the Clinton/Gore administration.

Coasting on his reputation among left-liberals as the only Democratic senator up for re-election who had voted against Clinton's welfare abolition legislation, Wellstone's stump speeches and TV appearances failed to offer up much more than generalities about poverty and children, and a vapid evocation of the need for grass-roots organizing as a substitute for money-intensive telepolitics. His earnest and well-meaning message had become so pabulum-like that it failed to excite his party's progressive activist core. As a disappointed I. Philip Sipser—the veteran labor lawyer who spearheaded the Wellstone effort in New York—remarked after a particularly uninspiring performance at his campaign kickoff there, "There was nothing in that speech that couldn't have been said by a hundred other liberal Democrats in Congress."

Although he is a principal co-sponsor (with Massachusetts' John Kerry) of the Clean Money, Clean Elections bill, which would replace special interest money with public financing, Wellstone failed to make the corrupting power of campaign

cash a central theme. Even the brown-shirted economic nationalist Pat Buchanan has been hammering an anti-corporate message much tougher lately than Wellstone's.

Since Wellstone's chances of actually snatching the nomination were always less than zero, he missed another opportunity to galvanize the activist base by taking his candidacy beyond the personal. Despite his history as a crackerjack field organizer, Wellstone put forward no specific, coherent strategy for coagulating an institutional left presence in his party that would allow for permanent, ongoing political work once his candidacy was over. In this, Wellstone failed to draw the proper lessons from the previous insurgent candidacies of Jesse Jackson and Jerry Brown, both of which left no lasting organizational mechanism at the grass roots.



The key element for Wellstone in determining whether to run was a direct-mail effort to solicit small contributions and identify troops for the campaign. But, without a sharp message and bereft of any organizational strategy, the direct-mail response was a disaster. With neither money nor foot soldiers, Wellstone's candidacy was doomed.

One of the things that made Wellstone's presidential candidacy potentially attractive in the beginning was his 1996 campaign pledge to Minnesota voters not to seek a third Senate term. Unhobbled by narrow, home-state electoral calculations, it was hoped Wellstone would have nothing to lose by offering a bold alternative to Al Gore and his K Street bagmen. But even by last summer some of his closest advisors were predicting that Wellstone would indeed run for re-election in

2002. This now seems increasingly probable—and these considerations no doubt played a part in shaping his watered-down performance.

With Wellstone out, the Democratic left is homeless for 2000. Among the other candidates, former New Jersey Sen. Bill Bradley is a Democratic Leadership Council neoconservative on most economic issues. He's counting on his aura of personal integrity. But the aloof and arrogant Bradley never has easily cultivated friendships in politics, and he has no natural network of support; indeed, as of yet, his campaign has no finance chairman.

Kerry has been moving toward running, and on social issues he has been decidedly more liberal than Gore—as a real leader in the Senate on AIDS and gay issues, for example. However, his message is a mixed bag: The centerpiece of his candidacy is a plan to turn every school into a charter school, as well as "end[ing] tenure as we know it" and dismantling the certification process—all of which most progressives take as an assault on public education. After lis-

tening to Kerry present his schools plan in a speech to the DLC, *The Weekly Standard's* David Brooks wrote, "With Democrats like these, who needs the Republicans?"

And then there's Jesse Jackson, who's been doing his quadrennial presidential tease, which knowledgeable observers take as nothing more than another shakedown cruise designed to extract the maximum in subsidies from Gore and the Democrats in exchange for not running.

If there's a lesson in all this, it is that future hopes for a credible left presidential candidacy inside the Democratic Party will depend on the creation of some national entity or federation of state-based progressive coalitions capable of fighting primaries at all levels and disciplining right-drifting Democrats. This could provide the institutional groundwork for a realignment of the national political discourse. Unless the economic crisis predicted by financier George Soros and others hits the United States this year, that will be the work of the next millennium. ■

# Good Wolf Hunting

By Jeffrey St. Clair

**T**he first Mexican gray wolf pup born in the wilds of the American Southwest in nearly 50 years is dead, presumably starving to death after its mother died in August 1998. When its mother perished, the pup was only four months old and was incapable of surviving on its own.

Known as wolf 174, the pup's mother was one of 11 Mexican gray wolves released into the Gila Mountains near the border between Arizona and New Mexico by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in March 1998. At first, the government suggested that the female wolf fell victim to an attack by a mountain lion—a rare way for a wolf to die. But an autopsy later revealed that the wolf had met a more traditional end: It had been shot.

Killing a Mexican wolf violates federal and state laws, and can carry a penalty of up to \$100,000 and a year in prison. Typically, however, the Fish and Wildlife Service has been reluctant to pursue such cases. An infamous example is the Montana rancher who shot a federally protected wolf and wasn't prosecuted, but who later ended up jailed and fined for shooting a neighbor's dog.

Wolf 174 was the fourth Mexican wolf to die after being released into the wild. Since her demise, at least two others have been killed and another is missing. The deaths have not been accidental. Instead, one by one, the wolves have been killed deliberately, apparent victims of a vigilante campaign by angry ranchers in the remote mountains of Arizona and New Mexico. Of the 11 original wolves, only three remain in the wild.

The Mexican wolf, known throughout the Southwest as El Lobo, is a diminutive subspecies of the timber wolf, which inhabits the Northern Rockies and the North Woods area of Minnesota and Michigan. The lobos were hunted to extinction in the wild by the '60s. After passage of the Endangered Species Act in 1972, four lobos were

captured in central Mexico and used to begin a captive breeding program. By the mid-'90s, zoos and other breeding facilities had generated 175 Mexican wolves. As a result of lawsuits by environmental groups, the Fish and Wildlife Service was forced to initiate a program to reintroduce the wolves into wilderness areas in eastern Arizona. Under the Mexican wolf recovery plan, the government has set a goal of having more than 100 wolves in the area by 2025.

When it was released in 1996, the government's reintroduction plan sparked fierce protests from ranchers, who lodged outlandish claims that the wolves would decimate their cattle and sheep herds. These assertions lacked any substance. Studies of wolf predation from Canada and Minnesota show that even in areas where wolves and livestock interact, wolves are reluctant to prey on domestic animals, preferring deer and elk, which are both abundant in the Blue Mountains of Arizona. The Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that when more than 100 wolves have taken root in the area, they will kill more than 10,000 deer and elk a year, while taking up to 34 cows and sheep. Defenders of Wildlife, a

Washington-based environmental group, has offered to compensate ranchers for any livestock losses to wolves.

The ranchers also claimed that the wolves posed a threat to humans. "We are afraid that some of these wolves are going to get ahold of one of our children," Jesse Carey, a gun shop owner and former sheriff in Catron County, N.M., recently told the *Phoenix New Times*. Carey's virulent anti-wolf rhetoric prompted federal law enforcement officials to seize guns from his shop to test against the bullets that killed the wolves.

"The notion that wolves will attack children is simply a scare tactic," says Dr. Robin Silver, a Phoenix physician and wolf advocate. "There's not one recorded instance of wild wolves preying on humans in North America. I don't think these wolves are going to change their evolutionary history."

The lobo has become the latest rallying cry for the anti-environmental movement. Despite national polls showing that more than 80 percent of the public supports wolf reintroduction, the antipathy for the wolf and its defenders is extreme across much of the rural West. The Southwest, in particular, has long been a breeding ground for some of the most virulent strains of the Wise-Use movement. Several counties have enacted ordinances challenging the federal government's authority to manage

*Continued on page 6*

**Terry LaBan**





# Appall-o-Meter

By David Futrelle



## Secret Agent Furby 8.2

Countless Americans have discovered the agony that is the Furby—the perpetually talkative, “interactive” stuffed monsters that are designed to “learn” English by yammering away constantly with anyone unfortunate enough to be in the room with them. Apparently, though, the National Security Agency is afraid that Furbies are more than merely annoying: They may be the first stuffed animal security risk. The furry creatures already have been officially banned from Fort Meade in Maryland.

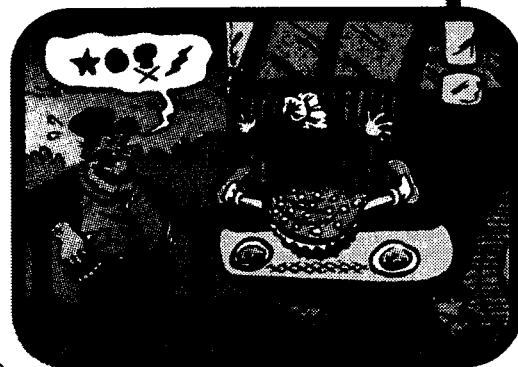
“Personally owned photographic, video and audio recording equipment are prohibited items. This includes toys, such as ‘Furbys,’ with built-in recorders that repeat the audio with synthesized sound to mimic the original signal,” reads the Furby Alert given to NSA employees in December. “We are prohibited from introducing these items into NSA spaces. Those who have should contact their Staff Security Officer for guidance.”

The agency was apparently concerned, as one government source told the *Washington Post*, “that people would take them home and they’d start talking classified.”

## Keep On Truckin’ 6.3

After 81-year-old Gertie Witherspoon was struck and killed by a grain truck on a Missouri highway last summer, her daughter was sued by the truck’s insurance company for her grandmother’s alleged “negligence” in stepping onto the highway in the first place.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, the Great Western Casualty Company sought \$2,800 from Joyce Lang, Gertie’s daughter, in recompense for the amount of damage her dead mother did to the big rig. As the *Journal* notes, the insurance company “concedes that the ... pursuit of \$2,888 is risky from a public relations standpoint.” “It doesn’t do anything to help people’s impressions of us,” says Scott



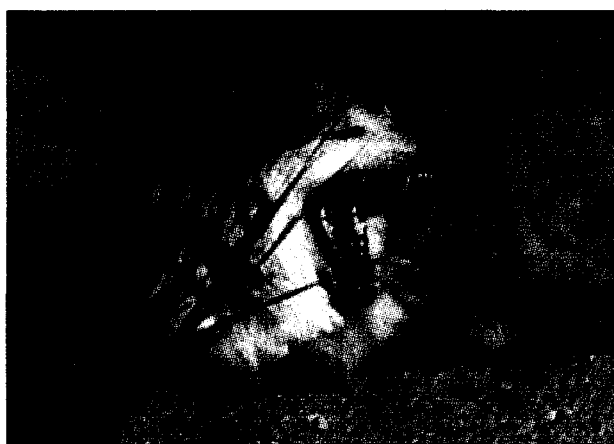
Rager, executive vice president of Great West. On Jan. 16, the company announced that it was withdrawing the claim.

Continued from page 5  
national forest lands and protect endangered species habitat. There have been numerous armed confrontations with federal officials and environmentalists.

In 1993, Leroy Jackson, a traditional Navajo who had challenged the decimation of his reservation’s forest by a white-owned timber company, received death threats and was later found dead in his van in a remote spot in northern New Mexico. In 1997, Santa Fe environmentalist Sam Hitt received death threats and was hung in effigy outside the offices of the organization he heads, Forest Guardians.

In December 1998, the Santa Fe offices of Animal Protection of New Mexico had its windows blown out by shotgun blasts. A group called the Minutemen has claimed responsibility

for the terrorist action. Police believe the attack was in retaliation for the group’s support of wolf reintroduction.



To deter ranchers, the wolves will be spray-painted orange.

One of the targets of this attack may have been Patricia Wolff, who works as a consultant for the group. Wolff has received several death threats, dating back to a 1992 incident investigated by

the FBI. Wolff also had released a tape recording of a May 1998 conversation she had with a trapper named Jody Lee

Cooper, who claimed that ranchers in Glenwood, N.M., had wanted to hire him to kill the reintroduced wolves. Cooper, who refers to himself as “the predator’s predator,” said that he had been offered “\$35,000 in cash to kill ‘em all.” Wolff took the tape to the Fish and Wildlife Service, which failed to follow up on the evidence. “I think he was truthful and credible,” Wolff says. “He had no motive to lie to me.”

This spring, 15 more wolves are scheduled to be released. The new wolves will be spray-painted orange, supposedly to differentiate them from coyotes, which ranchers can legally kill. This glow-in-the-dark marking, however, may just make the animals easier targets. ■



# Rudy's Sweet Stock Deal

By Neil deMause

**A**fter months of backroom brokering and whispered rumors, in December, New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani announced a plan to give nearly \$1 billion in public money to keep a city institution in town. And—surprise!—it wasn't the Yankees.

While Giuliani's dream of a new Yankee Stadium remains on hold, the mayor has found a new beneficiary for his civic largesse: the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE). Under a plan announced on Dec. 22, the city and state will spend at least \$700 million to buy land and build the exchange a new headquarters across Wall Street from its current home and provide an additional \$160 million in tax breaks and low-cost electricity. The old exchange building will be converted into a police substation.

And what will the city get in return? "Basically, the stock exchange agrees to stay at this facility for the next 50 years, with renewal options of up to 99 years," mayoral spokesman Kurt Ritter says. What about guarantees that the exchange will maintain its current work force? "Nothing on job retention," he says.

"To spend that much money per job and not have a clawback for retention requirement is outrageous, frankly," says Greg LeRoy of Good Jobs First, whose "No More Candy Store" remains the definitive treatise on corporate subsidies.

Nonetheless, this has been standard operating procedure for the Giuliani administration. According to state Sen. Franz Leichter, the mayor has doled out \$1.75 billion in "corporate retention" subsidies to more than 40 companies in his five years in office, most without any job retention

requirements. In fact, about a quarter of the beneficiaries have since made significant layoffs.

Clocking in at well over \$100,000 per job retained (about 5,000 people work the exchange floor, but only about 1,000 are employed directly by the NYSE), the stock exchange deal ranks among the most expensive in history. For his part, the mayor has argued that dozens of other firms might have followed the NYSE out of town, and the subsidy was necessary to ensure that "the heart of Wall Street will remain on Wall Street."

Yet critics note that other Wall Street stalwarts such as Merrill Lynch and Travelers have already cut deals for city money to stay in town. And as for the NYSE, "most people say that they were never thinking about going to New Jersey in the first place," Leichter aide Jonathan Bowles says.

Even corporate subsidy expert LeRoy, who notes that "no city has been shaken down by more major employers than New York," seems stunned by the NYSE announcement. "Wow, \$100,000 per retention, that's really pricey," he says. "It would be typical in economic develop-

ment to do deals where the price tag per job might be \$10,000—that would be pricey, but not unheard of. You've got to ask yourself, what else could we have done with the money if we had chosen not to spend it on that?"

City schools activists estimate that \$900 million could provide 42 new 800-seat schools citywide, eliminating New

York's overcrowding problems.

On Dec. 14, as the NYSE deal was being finalized, Leichter joined four City Council members in introducing a

## Etc.

### Justice Served

The United Farm Workers union has won another battle. In November, the California Agricultural Relations Board (ALRB) threw out a union election at Coastal Berry, the nation's largest employer of strawberry workers, finding that 162 workers at the company's Oxnard Ranch weren't given the opportunity to vote.

The UFW refused to participate in the July election and accused its winner, the Coastal Berry Farmworkers Committee, of being a company union (see "Strawberry Workers Elect Shady Company Union," September 6). The Coastal Berry Farmworkers Committee is appealing the decision.

The UFW made significant contributions to newly elected California Gov. Gray Davis' campaign and hopes he'll reward them with a more sympathetic ALRB, which Republican governors had stocked with conservative members over the past 16 years. Davis is expected to appoint three of the board's five seats by March, and a new general counsel in July. "There have been 16 years of not representing farm workers," Dolores Huerta, co-founder of the UFW, told the *Sacramento Bee*. "We have pinned our hopes on Gray Davis so the farm workers can finally get some justice." **K.K.**

bill to require that the mayor give the council 30 days' notice of any corporate subsidies of more than \$1 million. "If this was an education investment or social welfare expenditure of nearly a billion dollars, there'd be all kinds of public scrutiny of this kind of deal," Bowles says.

Instead, as of mid-January, the mayor's office had yet to make public the details of the agreement, even to the council itself—a policy that has become Giuliani's trademark. "There's enormous secrecy with these deals," Bowles says. "Once the council or the public hears about it, it's already done." ■

### The Top 10 Shakedown Artists:

Recipients of the 10 largest corporate subsidies under New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani:

New York Stock Exchange	\$800 million (est.)
NASDAQ/AMEX	\$200 million
Mercantile Exchange	\$183.9 million
Bear Stearns	\$75 million
American International Group	\$55.7 million
CS First Boston	\$50.5 million
McGraw Hill/Standard & Poor's	\$34.5 million
DLJ	\$29.5 million
Merrill Lynch	\$28.5 million
Capital Cities/ABC	\$26 million
The Travelers	\$22.1 million

Source: N.Y. state Sen. Franz Leichter and press reports.

# Apocalypse for Sale

**T**he typical Y2K story goes something like this: A humble Midwesterner is building a bunker in his basement and stockpiling it with two generators, 100 gallons of bottled water, 25 pounds of beef jerky, an extra pair of camouflage overalls, gold coins and a shotgun to ward off looters. Why? Well, 30 years ago shortsighted nerds designed computers to only recognize six digit dates (e.g., 12.31.99), which means that at the stroke of midnight on Jan. 1, 2000—a.k.a. “the glitching hour”—the world’s computers will think it’s 1900 and go haywire. Some say it could be The End of the World As We Know It (or, as those in the know prefer, TEOTWAWKI). We’re running out of time. All of the computer codes are encrypted in the names of obscure *Star Trek* characters, and the programmers are too busy trying to beat the new *Legend of Zelda* to save the planet. Don’t panic or hoard. Why aren’t you panicking or hoarding yet?!

In truth, things might get a little messy, but Y2K problems will likely be minor. ATM cards won’t work and the Rose Bowl may be postponed (though, as the January issue of *Vanity Fair* notes, “there is a small, finite risk that this could lead to accidental nuclear war.”) What you should really be worrying about is your neighbors: Y2K-phobia is in full swing.

Nobody’s happier about this than the Christian right, according to a survey of extreme-right periodicals and Web sites in the Fall 1998 issue of The Southern Poverty Law Center’s *Intelligence Report*. While the John Birch Society and the Michigan militia see Y2K as a global conspiracy plot, other extremists view it as “an opening for revolution or a fulfillment of biblical prophecy.”

Groups ranging from Christian Reconstructionists to the Ku Klux Klan have recognized that the terror of technological meltdown is good for recruiting. “These are people who are super-sensitive to anything that suggests the collapse of social institutions,” millennialism expert Michael Balkun says. “Since nuclear

war really is no longer out there as a terribly likely way for civilization to end, they’ve got to find something else. Y2K is convenient.”

Indeed, as Tom Junod writes in the January issue of *Esquire*, Y2K is the perfect “mainstream apocalypse” for a



“mainstream apocalyptic cult” like Christianity. He attended the Christian Broadcasting Network’s Y2K Conference last fall, where Pat Robertson and 200 Cassandras gathered to compare bulk bean prices and prepare for their “finest hour.” “The whole point is evangelism,” Dale Moseley, who runs a disaster relief service in Oregon, told the crowd. “We’ve seen incredible results in disasters. When people have lost everything, when they have gotten to the point where they have nothing left, they’re incredibly open to hearing the gospel.”

Right-wingers aren’t the only ones who see Y2K as an opportunity. The New Age left is also ready for The Rapture. Trading in fire and brimstone for tofu and crystals, contributors to the *Utne Reader*’s Y2K Citizen’s Action Guide do recommend stockpiling at least 20 pounds of corn, but they also remind readers to talk about their feelings and take time for “inner preparedness.” This sect views the pre-millennial panic as a chance to “build family feeling throughout the community” and create “public citizens.” “As we prepare for Y2K,” Eric Utne writes in the pamphlet’s introduction, “something surprising and quite wonderful is going to happen. We’re going to get to know our neighbors.”

On the surface, these goals seem noble, if a bit mushy. But behind the

talk of “common humanity,” the apocalypse is a yuppie luxury. There’s not a lot of room in the bunker for those without a Whole Foods in their neighborhood or an SUV to cart home 50 gallons of soy milk. To prepare for Y2K, you need disposable income. The back of the *Utne* guide is filled with lists of things to buy: catalogs of “appropriate technology,” preparedness videos and books with titles like *The Passive Solar House* and *The Humanure Handbook*.

The millennialist militia members are spending even more than the survivalist soccer moms. Robertson and Jerry Falwell are marketing Y2K videos to them. It costs a mere \$225 to subscribe to *Remnant Review*, Christian Reconstructionist Gary North’s newsletter, which not only suggests buying gold and grain, but recommends “15 stocks which stand to benefit from this crisis.”

That’s just the beginning of Y2K merchandising: Amazon.com sells around 50 books with Y2K in the title.

**There’s not a lot of room in the bunker for those without a Whole Foods nearby or an SUV to cart home gallons of soy milk.**

Peter de Jager—the man many credit with first sounding the Y2K alarm—reportedly pulls in more than \$1 million a year in speaking fees and book and tape sales. And an American Stock Exchange listing of Y2K remediation companies—nicknamed the “de Jager 2000 index”—increased in value during its first year of operation at more than two times the rate of the Dow.

All of this fearmongering isn’t really about spreading the word of Jesus or Robert Bly after people have lost everything. The point is to manufacture panic while Master Card is still working. If Y2K turns out not to be TEOTWAWKI, the false prophets won’t be ruined—they’ll be rich. ■



# King's Radical Legacy

**E**rnest Hemingway once wrote that "the dignity ... of an iceberg is due to only one eighth of it being above water," while the rest remains submerged, unavailable to the naked eye. Something of the same might be said for Martin Luther King Jr. Though there are a number of reasons why we should all be grateful for the federal holiday each January honoring the birth of King, we should also recognize that this event helps to promote a shallow understanding of his true intellectual legacy, leading to a misconstrued image of King that he scarcely could have endorsed himself.

The scores of politicians who spoke on Jan. 18 about the pressing need to fulfill King's "Dream," for example, were generally endorsing a simplified, static portrait of King. Meanwhile, we have been bombarded with a steady stream of television commercials, advertisements and newspaper articles that imply King was merely a liberal reformer, whose sole preoccupation was civil rights. Where was the discussion of King's plans to transform the structures of power and privilege in society? Who remembered King's call for a "radical revolution" of American values? As historian Vincent Harding has remarked, "It appears as if the price for the first national holiday honoring a black man is the development of a massive case of national amnesia."

Even before the advent of his public career, King pondered fundamental economic changes in American society. "I imagine you already know that I am much more socialistic in my economic theory than capitalistic," a 23-year-old King wrote in a 1952 letter to Coretta Scott. If most Americans don't know this, the federal government certainly did. Because of his alleged ties to Communism, the FBI launched an extended campaign to smear King, tapping his phones, sending him threatening mail and trying to discredit him among journalists and potential donors and supporters. Following King's famous speech at the 1963 March on Washington, FBI Assistant Director Louis Sullivan charged that King had

become (in a curious pair of adjectives), "The most dangerous and effective Negro leader in the country."

We further need to be reminded that King demanded a total restructuring of our foreign policies, and—unlike Jesse Jackson and many other "leftists" of our



era—he would have had nothing but scorn for President Clinton's criminal bombings of Sudan, Afghanistan and Iraq. Indeed, King began speaking out against U.S. militarism as early as 1965. Most symptomatic of this, of course, was the "nightmarish conflict" in Vietnam, which he said was "one of the most unjust wars that has ever been fought in the history of the world."

In the last years of his life, King also began to focus greater attention on entrenched patterns of exploitation. In these terms, integration did not simply mean mixed lunch counters or diverse neighborhoods, but rather a meaningful sharing of power and responsibility in all aspects of society. Though it is true that King pined for a nation where people would be judged "not by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character," few things are more deliberately cynical than the conjecture of conservatives—from Ward Connerly to David Horowitz—who claim that King would have opposed present-day affirmative action programs. In fact, the opposite is true. In his 1964 book, *Why We Can't Wait*, King argued that "among the vital jobs to be done, the nation ... must incorporate into its planning some compensatory consideration for the handicaps [the Negro] has inherited from the past." Elsewhere, he cited both

the federal GI Bill and India's program of "preferences" for the "untouchables" as worthy efforts to make up for disadvantages that certain groups had faced.

King also spoke publicly against "systemic rather than superficial flaws" in our economic system, questioning the basic tenets of capitalism and calling for full employment, national health care and a guaranteed annual wage. As a means to these ends, he envisioned a massive escalation of nonviolent civil disobedience. Whereas much of his early work in the South simply sought a recognition of general principles mirrored in the Constitution, King planned for subsequent campaigns to be waged in *confrontation* with the federal government. Nonviolence, he argued, "must be adapted to urban conditions and urban moods. ... There must be more than a statement to the larger society, a force that interrupts its functioning at some key point."

But above all, King called for a revolutionary re-examination of America's character: a point that was lost on virtu-

**We need to look beyond the popular, sanitized images of Martin Luther King Jr. that are spooned out to us.**

ally all of the journalists and politicians who commemorated King this year. Obviously, we should continue to honor King's greatness on the third Monday of each January. But in the future, we need to demand that these celebrations look beyond the popular, sanitized images of King that are spooned out to us annually. As Stanford historian Clayborne Carson has pointed out, "The historical King was far too interesting to be encased in simple, didactic legends designed to offend no one." ■

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It's not the 40 acres and a mule once promised to black freedmen, but the recent ruling requiring the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to pay hundreds of millions of dollars to African-American farmers could result in the largest compensatory settlement for racial bias in U.S. history. But because of their tragic history, even such a large settlement is too little, too late for the diminishing numbers of blacks who still farm for a living.

U.S. District Judge Paul Friedman made his Jan. 5 ruling to settle a 1997 class-action lawsuit that charged the USDA with racial discrimination in parceling out farm loans and subsidies. Initiated by 1,000 black farmers, the suit covers claims from 1981—the year the Reagan administration began dismantling USDA's Office of Civil Rights—to 1996, when the Clinton administration restored it. Total claims are estimated to exceed \$375 million, but the figure is impossible to calculate until officials have a better idea of the number of affected farmers. Alexander Pires, an attorney for the plaintiffs, expects about 5,000 farmers to seek the settlement.

Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman says the unprecedented agreement "will close a painful chapter in USDA history."

black-owned farms. Deficit financing is the primary fuel of farming. Loans are granted to farmers based on their next crop to cover their operating expenses. If farmers cannot obtain capital in a timely fashion, they face ruin.

The USDA is the lender of last resort for those who lack access to private financing. According to Boyd, black farmers have complained primarily that the USDA provides loans to white farmers at lower interest rates than to blacks, grants loans to blacks later in the crop season than whites and often shelves black farmers' loan applications altogether or falsifies the data on them. The major problem was that the Farm Service Agency—the lending arm of the USDA—was decentralized and its 2,500 local offices were manned by local farmers who were overwhelmingly white. Loan recommendations also were handled by local farmers committees that tended to exclude black participation, particularly in the South.

In 1970, a USDA investigation first concluded that the agency was insensitive to civil rights and rife with nepotism and cronyism. A decade later, a 1982 study by the agency's Civil Rights Commission dramatically predicted that black farmers would be extinct by 2000 unless the federal govern-

# Too Little, Too Late for Black Farmers

By Salim Muwakkil

Indeed, the 16-year period covered by the suit was characterized by official indifference to black farmers' unique plight, but crippling racial biases have stymied African-American's agricultural ambitions from the nation's very beginning. Still, the ruling is historic as the first time the federal government has conceded its actions were discriminatory and agreed to compensate blacks as victims of that discrimination.

"There's no doubt that the settlement was a national victory and a form of vindication for black farmers," says John Boyd Jr., founder and president of the National Black Farmers Association and a Virginia poultry farmer. "In fact, I see it as an overall victory for black people in general." But, Boyd adds, "the amount of money is peanuts and does little to really rectify the systemic injustice at the Agriculture Department." The lawsuit initially had sought \$3.5 billion. Boyd himself has been denied USDA loans nine times.

The vast majority of African-American farmers are in the South and the region's tradition of Jim Crow segregation has excluded blacks from private credit markets. Thus, black farmers are disproportionately dependent on USDA loans to stay afloat. As a result, many have sunk and others are sinking.

In 1920, 14 percent of American farmers were black. Since then, Boyd says, blacks have left farming at five times the rate of whites. By 1992, the number of black farmers had dwindled to 18,816—less than 1 percent of the nation's farmers. According to preliminary figures from the Census Bureau, the current percentage is even lower: Of the 1.4 million people who operated or managed farms in the U.S. in 1995, just 8,000 were black.

For the past three decades, black farmers have blamed USDA discrimination in loan disbursements for the decline in

ment placed "adequate emphasis on dealing with the crisis." A year later, a task force report found that local USDA officials were "rude and insensitive to black farmers," that their projected crop yields were calculated differently from those of white farmers, and that blacks were sometimes rejected because of "computation errors."

Even in the face of those damning conclusions, little was done to reform the agency. A 1990 House committee report found that minority farmers had lost significant amounts of land and potential farm income as a result of USDA discrimination. The National Black Farmers Association filed its suit against the government in 1997, shortly after yet another internal USDA probe found evidence of "bias, hostility, greed, ruthlessness and indifference" to black farmers applying for loans. That year, an internal civil rights task force discovered so many problems that it urged the agency to implement 92 specific recommendations to help alleviate them.

The settlement doesn't refer to the recommendations, but Boyd says institutional changes in the agency are essential for the USDA to operate free of bias in the future. "The one thing I'm distressed about is that Secretary Glickman has not terminated any of those high officials who allowed this kind of discrimination against black farmers to persist," Boyd adds. "Now you have a lawsuit that's going to cost taxpayers millions and millions of dollars, and it just seems to me that somebody should be held accountable."

Glickman says civil service rules have prevented him from disciplining current employees who participated in or supervised discriminatory practices. But late last year, the USDA did alter policies for staffing local offices and tighten oversight of the farm loan operations.

Boyd generally gives high marks to Glickman. "He inherited an agency with a horrendous history of racism and anti-black sentiments and has really done a lot to help change it," he says.



"The department still has problems, but at least it seems to be heading in the right direction."

But some black farmers fear the settlement will divert attention from the serious problems that still remain at the USDA. The department remains the focus of many other lawsuits alleging discrimination against minority and female employees in job and training opportunities. The USDA long has been ridiculed as America's "last plantation," and the segregationist sentiments that dominated the agency for most of its 137-year history have been difficult to eliminate. The USDA's Coalition of Minority Employees has accused the 90,000-person agency of widespread racial discrimination and insists that there have been only minor changes during Glickman's tenure.



BOB FITCH

The modest amounts shaken loose in the recent ruling won't relieve the debt burden of many black farmers. The settlement covers only farmers with complaints of discrimination that occurred between 1983 and 1997 and offers them three options. Most of the farmers are expected to accept a simple provision that would grant them tax-free payments of \$50,000 each and forgive their federal debts. J.L. Chestnut, one of the attorneys representing the black farmers, told the *Washington Post* that most debts ranged between \$75,000 and \$150,000.

Farmers with more documented evidence of discrimination can opt to have their cases settled by a court-appointed arbitrator and seek larger damages. Farmers also may choose to exclude themselves from the settlement and have their cases settled administratively within the USDA. In addition to cash payments and debt forgiveness, all claimants will be given priority on future government loans and may have foreclosed farmland returned to them if it is still owned by the federal government. "One of our biggest issues was getting the land back for farmers that were wronged," Boyd says. "So the provision for the return of foreclosed land was a huge victory."

But Judge Friedman's ruling does not free black farmers from the commercial debt burden they assumed while denied access to government money. Charles Dennard, a farmer in Pineview, Ga., told the *New York Times* that he has accumulated \$88,000 in debt to private lenders who are pressuring him to foreclose. Had he been granted the USDA loans he initially sought, he would not have incurred so much debt.

"The settlement is significant and historic, but it in no way restores the economic impact of millions of acres lost to the black community because of discrimination," says Ralph Paige, executive director of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund, a 30-year-old organization that assists black farmers in the South with expertise in farm management. Still, Paige adds, it "could be the beginning of a much needed healing process, which would then hopefully lead the nation and the government to addressing the countless systemic problems within the USDA and American agriculture generally."

The settlement of the black farmers' suit may pave the way for a more extensive claim by African-Americans to reparations for a history of racial bias by other government agencies. Legislation introduced by Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.) annually since 1989 calls for a study of how slavery and a century of official apartheid affected African-Americans. The Commission to Study Reparations Proposals for African-Americans Act languishes in Congress each time it is reintroduced.

"I really don't see any differences between the argument of the black farmers who sued for compensation from past discrimination and our argument for reparations for all descendants of former slaves," says Robert Starks, associate professor of political science at Northeastern Illinois University's Center for Inner City Studies in Chicago. "We've been making the argument for years that clear evidence of governmental racism has directly impeded our progress as a people. The black farmers made that same argument, and the Agriculture Department seems to agree with them."

Starks has a point. The logic that justified the USDA settlement—compensation is necessary to redress economic inequities rooted in a history of racial exclusion—also makes the case for more widespread reparations. In fact, reparations are not just logical, they also could soothe public tensions provoked by issues like affirmative action and other programs of racial preferences. However, the political climate has been unremittingly hostile to the case for reparations since President Andrew Johnson vetoed 40-acres-and-a-mule legislation 133 years ago. If the recent settlement to black farmers doesn't mark the beginning of a change in that attitude, at least it offers a fruitful legal strategy. ■

# Toxic Avengers

**The EPA is pushing hazardous sludge as fertilizer.  
The locals are fighting back.**

**By Laura Orlando**

It all started with the Clean Water Act. In 1972, the federal government decided to get tough by regulating waste discharged from municipal sewage treatment plants. Because every plant in the United States had a pipeline dumping noxious waste into a body of water, Congress mandated and funded upgraded treatment processes. Improving treatment meant cleaner wastewater at the end of the pipe, but it elevated the level of contaminants in the dregs of the process—the mud-like toxic waste called sludge. Between 1972 and 1987, \$60 billion was spent by municipalities to build and upgrade treatment plants, which now produce about 8 million dry tons of sludge annually.

Sewage is a mixture of whatever is flushed down toilets, runs off roads, is disposed of by industries and enters one of the nation's 16,000 publicly owned treatment plants. After treatment, the liquid component, wastewater, is discharged into the nearest body of water. Sludge, the semisolid residual, is everything leftover, including an unpredictable mix of heavy metals, synthetic chemicals, radioactive waste, medicines and so on.

For years, most cities on the coasts simply dumped their sludge into the ocean. This practice ended after garbage and syringes washed up on New York and New Jersey beaches in the summer of 1987. Contrary to public perception, the garbage had nothing to do with sludge dumping from barges 12 miles from the shore, but lawmakers swiftly responded to pressure from environmentalists with the Ocean Dumping Ban Act, which outlawed the transportation and dumping of sludge into the ocean after 1991. New York and New Jersey, however, still needed a place to put the 11 million wet tons of sludge they were dumping each year.

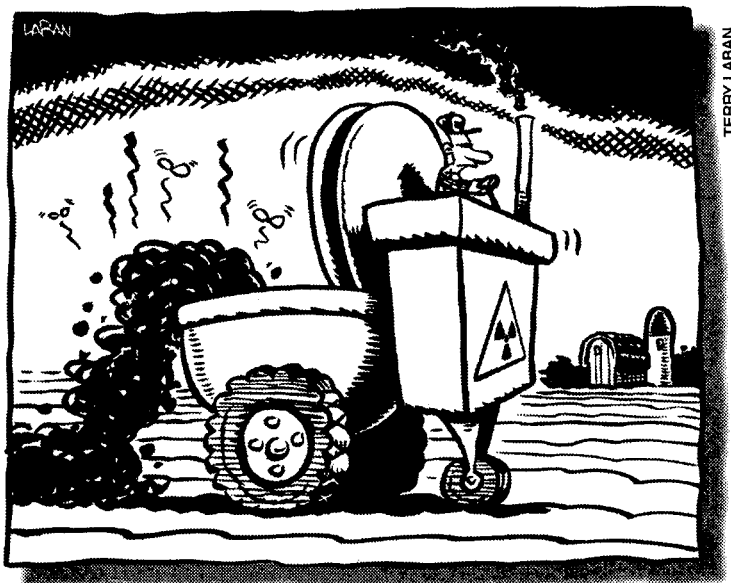
Enter the Environmental Protection Agency: A year after ocean dumping was banned, the EPA rewrote the rules governing disposal of sewage sludge, reclassifying the noxious stuff from a hazardous material to a "safe" fertilizer. Sludge

also underwent a linguistic detoxification and marketing makeover—sludge became "biosolids" and disposal became "beneficial use." By 1993, the EPA had formulated the National Biosolids Management Program to promote sewage sludge as fertilizer. Now, more than 2.5 million tons of sludge are being spread on land each year.

The EPA regulates only 21 of the countless pollutants in sludge, leaving thousands of contaminants, like dioxin and PCBs, unregulated and headed for gardens and farmland. Even the notion that sludge is a useful fertilizer—as a source of nitrogen—is phony. In the billions of gallons of wastewater and mounds of sludge, there is human excreta and, in that, nitrogen. But only tertiary (or advanced) treatment—used by less than a third of U.S. treatment plants—has the capacity to remove nitrogen from wastewater and put it in sludge. And the more thorough the treatment process, the more toxic the sludge. "The EPA required the petroleum and automotive industries to change the way they do business and to decrease the amount of environmental lead pollution that was occurring due to lead and gasoline," says Stanley Tackett, an expert on the effects of lead in the environment. "It's ironic now that one application of sewage sludge to a field puts more lead in the soil than did the 60 years of driving by the field with leaded gasoline."

The waste management industry profits handsomely from the EPA's sludge-as-fertilizer ruse. These "refuse collectors" are hired by treatment plants to haul and spread sludge. Between 1992 and 2002, New York City alone expects to spend more than \$2.5 billion on sludge management programs. A large part of this money will go to contractors like Browning-Ferris Industries and WMX Technologies, which haul hundreds of tons of sludge as far away as Texas every day.

Farmers take sludge because they are hoodwinked into thinking it's a good fertilizer. They get it for free or at a nominal charge, with treatment plants paying for its transportation, application and the necessary monitoring and record-keeping. Some farmers are even paid to take it. Once spread, however, all liability for putting the poison on the land transfers to the landowner.





As the horror stories mount—such as Vermont dairy farmer Robert Ruane's, who watched his cows die from eating sludge-contaminated soil and feed—word is getting out that toxic sludge is incompatible with agriculture. At the local level, people are challenging the EPA's sludge disposal policies. "The sludge industry says they have to comply with strict state and federal rules," says Helene Shields of the anti-sludge group Citizens For Future New Hampshire. "Let's consider this analogy: A state trooper pulls you over and tells you, 'You have to comply with strict speed limits,' then tells you to go on your way and don't go any faster than 170 miles per hour. That is exactly what is happening with EPA and New Hampshire sludge rules."

New Hampshire produces about 24,000 tons of sludge each year. But the state's "open-door policy" allows the import of sludge from states like Massachusetts with stricter environmental regulations. Half of the sewage sludge being dumped in New Hampshire is coming from out of state. Shields says that without federal or state regulations, "the only way you can protect yourself is by enacting local ordinances or bans."

Local control is the big issue facing sludge opponents across the country. In New Hampshire, 44 towns have stopped or restricted sludge spreading through various local mechanisms. In neighboring Vermont, where 40 percent of the state's sludge is spread on land, getting local control over sludge processing and disposal has been a rallying point for groups such as Rural Vermont and East Montpelier's Citizens for Clean Compost. In East Montpelier, residents voted overwhelmingly to stop construction of a sludge composting plant. The nonbinding vote—taken by the city government to gauge public opinion—was ignored by city officials. But residents have managed to tie up the permitting process, temporarily halting construction. The Clean Land Campaign was formed in July 1998 to help push responsible sludge legislation—such as giving towns the right to a binding vote on sludge composting facilities—through the Vermont legislature.

California, where 1.8 million tons of sludge is dumped on farmland each year, has the best record for turning the sludge haulers away. County by county, Californians have exerted control over the spreading of sludge, and have gotten local bans and ordinances that put restrictions on its disposal. Three counties—San Bernardino, Stanislaus and San Joaquin—have banned it outright.

Another promising strategy is the tracking of sludge applications. Such disclosure will not only make farmers think twice before accepting sludge and alert opponents to its whereabouts, but may also influence the future value of the land. "When pesticides are used in California, a permit is filed in the agricultural commissioner's office and an application report is completed by the supplier," says Jane Beswick, a dairy farmer and coordinator of the Coalition for Sludge Education. "The parcel is therefore tagged and anyone interested can find out who has used what pesticide where. Tagging the parcel when sludge is spread would make it possible for any future purchaser or tenant to know whether sludge had ever been used."

In San Luis Obispo County, David Broadwater learned about a plan by Bio Gro, one of the 530 subsidiaries of WMX Technologies, to spread 17,000 tons of sludge annually on local ranches. Taking Bio Gro by surprise, Broadwater lobbied the regional water board to require an Environmental Impact Report for the project. Bio Gro decided not to pursue the report, stopping the dumping.

## Radioactive Sludge

Adrienne Anderson says that the Environmental Protection Agency's reclassification of sludge as a safe fertilizer has created a loophole "large enough to drive nuclear weapons waste dump trucks through."

Anderson was one of only two members of Denver's Metro Waste Water Reclamation District board to oppose an EPA plan to take radioactive groundwater from the Lowry Landfill Superfund site in nearby Arapahoe County, run it through a pipeline to the Denver municipal waste treatment system and spread the resulting radioactive sludge on a city-owned 41,000-acre farm just outside of town. Lowry was the dumping ground for other Colorado Superfund sites, and it includes hazardous waste from the Rocky Mountain Arsenal, which produced nerve gas, Martin Marietta's Titan Missile program and Coors' nuclear fuel rod making days. The pipeline is a convenient way to transfer liability to the public and rid the Department of Energy of a nasty problem.

The EPA has approved the disposal of wastewater from 32 other Superfund sites into municipal sewer systems across the country, but Lowry is the only one known to contain plutonium. The EPA and DOE continue to deny that the plutonium contamination at Lowry is out of the ordinary. Indeed, an EPA contractor at the Lowry site, CH2M Hill, attributed plutonium readings to "cosmic dust falling from space." Yet Anderson has found an index of 8,800 secret government documents related to Lowry. The listing, mostly blacked out because of claims of national security, demonstrates that there was "significant activity to deny the presence of plutonium," Anderson says.

In July 1998, Denver Mayor Wellington Webb decided to get rid of his own little problem by dismissing Anderson from the water board. She now has a whistleblower case pending with the Labor Department. Without her around, the water board has proposed allowing plutonium to be pumped into the sewer lines at levels 160 times higher than Colorado's drinking water standard for plutonium. Colorado already is the only state that sets any "acceptable" level for plutonium. And the board has rebuffed demands by citizen and environmental groups for a public hearing on the issue. The pipeline has been completed and, as plans now stand, Lowry wastewater will be pumped into Metro's sewage system later this year. **L.O.**

Of course, turning back the sludge trucks is just the first step. Unless sludge is treated with the precautions and regulations other hazardous wastes now receive, polluters will always find another field. The EPA's sludge disposal policy must be changed if this serious form of pollution is to stop being shuffled from county to county and from industry to the public. "The EPA is putting pressure on the state to control local folks," Broadwater warns. "A big steamroller is coming." ■

Laura Orlando is executive director of the ReSource Institute for Low Entropy Systems in Boston.

# Going Bananas

## An Absurd U.S. Trade Policy Sacrifices National Interests for Corporate Ones

By David Moberg

**J**udging by U.S. trade policies, bananas are more important to the national economy than steel. Of course, the United States grows almost no bananas, while its steel industry employs more than 225,000 well-paid, skilled workers. Yet the Clinton administration, strongly prodded by Congressional leaders from both parties, has gone to the brink of a trade war with the European Union (EU) over bananas, while offering little more than band-aids and soothing words to an embattled steel industry, already bleeding from the shrapnel of this year's economic bombshells.

These two cases point out the inadequacy of purist free-trade ideology, which typically rewards the strongest corporations and hurts workers, as a method of governing the global economy. They also show Washington acting increasingly like the capital of a banana republic, a comic travesty of a government, where policies are dictated more by the political contributions of multinational companies than by national interest.

**T**he banana war dates back to 1993, when the EU tried to forge a common policy on banana imports that reserved special quotas for banana producers from former colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. After the World Trade Organization (WTO) was created in 1994, Chiquita, the Cincinnati-based fruit company, filed a trade complaint, claiming it was harmed by EU policy, which guaranteed the former colonies about one-fifth of banana imports free of duties. A year later, the United States, and several Latin American companies where the big U.S. fruit companies operate, filed a formal complaint against the EU. The United States wants to eliminate any quotas for Asian, Caribbean and Pacific exporters to Europe. And while it is willing to accept some differential tariffs, these would not guarantee markets that the small producers need to survive.

Originally, the EU figured the WTO would simply deny legal standing to the United States, since it produces no bananas for export. But in a decision that is important for many U.S.-based transnational companies that design and market goods produced elsewhere, the WTO ruled that transporting and peddling products are "services" guaranteed the same free trade protections as banking or advertising. The WTO eventually ruled in 1997 against the EU, which revised its banana policy in response, but the United States continued to insist it was too restrictive.

In December 1998, the WTO agreed to judge whether the EU policy was acceptable. The United States refused to wait, claiming that if the EU didn't back down it had the right to

slap \$520 million in punitive tariffs on European exports ranging from handbags and cashmere sweaters to paper cartons and pecorino cheese. The tariffs are scheduled to go into effect no later than March 1999. In recent months, the escalating war has focused on the mechanics of trade disputes. If the EU is allowed to drag out implementation of WTO rulings or enact halfway measures without facing trade sanctions, the United States argues, then the legitimacy of the WTO is in question. The EU responds that the WTO will be undermined if the United States is allowed to judge the adequacy of its policies and impose sanctions.

Why would the United States pick a nasty trade fight with its closest economic and political allies over an issue that involves virtually no American jobs at a time when the world economy is on the brink of collapse? The obvious answer is Carl Lindner. From 1991 to 1998, Chiquita top banana Lindner, his family, his companies and their executives gave nearly \$5 million to political candidates and parties (78 percent of it to Republicans), according to the Center for Responsive Politics. As a result, top Republicans, from Bob Dole and Trent Lott to Newt Gingrich and Bob Livingston, have repeatedly introduced legislation pressing Lindner's agenda. Last fall, Lott blocked the appointment of a trade representative over the banana issue and pushed legislation to penalize Europe if Clinton—who also counts Lindner as a top donor—did not impose sanctions.

Lindner, a right-wing ideologue whose family is worth more than \$1 billion, built a chain of ice cream stores into a financial empire with the help of junk bond king Michael Milken. In 1984, Lindner raided United Brands, the heir to the notorious United Fruit Company and grower of Chiquita bananas. Now Chiquita controls about 26 percent of the world banana trade, and the top three companies—Chiquita, Dole and Del Monte—control 64 percent of all banana exports. Despite U.S. protests over European policies, so-called "dollar bananas" from mainly Latin American countries already account for 62 percent of imports, and the big three control 42 percent of the European market. Indeed, Del Monte has no objection to EU banana policy, and Dole has minor complaints. However, Chiquita—whose profits have been depressed because of a debt burden—is calling the plays.

The biggest losers in the banana fight are the small producers in the Caribbean, especially the Windward Islands, where bananas provide more than half of all export earnings and around 17 percent of the gross domestic product. The small farmers in many Caribbean countries, where



bananas are an ideal crop despite the hilly terrain, cannot compete with the big plantations that Chiquita operates in Central America. No viable alternative crops or industries have succeeded in the Caribbean, except for marijuana, exports of which are likely to increase to the United States if American trade demands succeed.

The plantation workers of Central America will not fare much better than the small farmers of the Windward Islands, despite Clinton administration pledges to increase support for workers rights around the world. Chiquita, in particular, has fought banana workers unions (which, incidentally, support the special treatment for Caribbean growers). Banana workers at two Guatemalan plantations that sell exclusively to Chiquita, for example, were fired a year ago when they tried to organize a union. In Costa Rica, Chiquita has rejected a contract that Del Monte signed. And now, in the wake of Hurricane Mitch's destruction of the plantations, Chiquita is threatening thousands of homeless and unemployed banana workers with leaving Honduras unless the union agrees to changes that would cut jobs and benefits. According to union representatives, Chiquita already pays less than half a cent per pound in labor costs. Its bananas are also cheap because the environmental costs of plantation banana production are not reflected in the price. Chiquita and other big producers use pesticides heavily, endangering the health of workers and polluting the local water supply. They often exhaust the land and move on rather than practicing sustainable agriculture.

The European Banana Action Network (Euroban), which represents nongovernmental organizations and trade unions, argues that neither the U.S. nor the EU proposals will promote socially and environmentally sustainable production. Euroban proposes auctioning the quotas and using the proceeds to assist producers in becoming more sustainable, and to diversify into new ventures. Such an auction, they argue, will protect the high-cost producers in the Windward Islands and open more markets to the small but rapidly growing marketing of "fair trade" bananas grown in socially and environmentally responsible ways.

**W**hile both sides in the trade dispute claim to be defending the world trading system, cases like this merely undermine its legitimacy. The United States already has lost two prominent WTO challenges to domestic environmental laws—one mandating cleaner gasoline, the other prohibiting importation of shrimp caught with nets without a device to

prevent the killing of endangered sea turtles. Even though neither was an example of veiled protectionism, the WTO ruled that "irrespective of their environmental purpose," such laws are "unjustifiable." The United States genuflected in the name of unencumbered global free trade, expecting the same obeisance from others.

Although the EU seems unlikely to retaliate immediately with higher tariffs on U.S. products, it is likely to fight back with its own trade complaints, which could include a renewed challenge to the reviled Helms-Burton Act, the U.S. law that penalizes some foreign companies for doing business with

Cuba. Another conflict is sure to erupt this spring over a successful U.S. challenge at the WTO of the EU's ban on growth hormones in beef cattle—a ban that applies to domestic EU production as well as imports. The Europeans plan to introduce new evidence justifying the ban, but the United States is likely to threaten more sanctions rather than simply export hormone-free beef to Europe.

As citizens become more conscious of how the WTO-enforced global free trade system takes away their democratic rights of self-government, including their rights to protect the environment and take precautions they choose on food safety, the legitimacy of the global trading system will plummet further. A December *Wall Street Journal* poll showed that 58 percent of Americans already think that increased trade has been bad for the country on the whole.

The fundamental problem with U.S. policy is that it elevates global free trade above all other values, rather than treat it as one good to be balanced among many. While it is legitimate to move toward more global rulemaking—the nominal objective of the WTO—those rules should not merely protect corporate economic interests. With its unbalanced pursuit of free trade in bananas, the United States undermines its own stated policies on other fronts, worsening poverty in Central America and the Caribbean and thereby encouraging illegal immigration and drug smuggling. Rulemaking that creates unregulated global markets does not promote an "even playing field." Instead, it gives the upper hand to the biggest corporations. It is absurd to think that uniform global trade rules can—or even should—completely replace legitimate bargaining over national interests. Despite the tide of globalization, people still work in economies that are national and participate as citizens in national states, whose differences and special interests demand attention.



Chiquita wants to dump its bananas on the European market.

JAMAL WILSON/APF

But U.S. trade policy under Clinton lacks any sense of national self-interest. It is, above all, concerned with maintaining the global system than runs roughshod over national and democratic interests on behalf of mobile transnational corporations and capital markets. U.S. policy is devoted to promoting the interests of individual U.S. corporations, even when there is minimal national economic interest, as in fighting for Chiquita's interests in Europe or lobbying Japan to gain access for Toys R Us (to sell toys made in China). If the United States follows through on its threats, the bipartisan fight for Chiquita would, by raising tariffs, either diminish European exports or raise prices for American consumers just to make one rich reactionary even richer.

**I**n stark contrast, there is a strong national interest in a healthy steel industry, not only for the large number of well-paid jobs but also for its close relationships with other materials and manufacturing industries. While the steel industry was a smug technological laggard in the '70s, the painful restructuring of the '80s—which wiped out 250,000 jobs—left the remaining industry very efficient. Yet even that record does not make it immune to crashes and panics. During the past year, imports—especially from Japan—have soared to record levels, 30 percent higher for the first 10 months compared to the year before (and 66 percent higher in the key market for hot-rolled sheets and coils). Prices plummeted, three steel makers declared bankruptcy, furnaces closed and more than 10,000 steel workers lost their jobs, while many others were forced to work shorter hours. (The job loss would have been far greater had the Steelworkers union not negotiated new job security protection in its last contract; if the crisis persists, the union will face very tough bargaining this year.)

The steel import crisis is largely a result of the spreading Asian economic collapse, which depressed demand for steel. Devaluations lowered the price drastically for some exporters, such as Korea, where the steel industry has also benefited from

government subsidies. Although imports have soared in Europe as well, European barriers have kept the quantities entering that market far below American levels (with Europe accepting one-tenth of the steel shipped by Japan to the United States). This fall, steel companies and the union complained that Japan, Russia and Brazil were dumping steel below the cost of production and asked for protection—with either tariffs or, as the union prefers, quotas—against the import surge. (In an unusual move for a corporation, Wheeling-Pittsburgh steel also filed a suit in federal court for immediate injunctive relief from imported steel produced by “child labor, outdated environmentally destructive open hearth furnaces, or work forces not being paid their just wages.”)

After some internal debate, in early January the Clinton administration rejected quotas and offered a package deal derided by both business and labor—tax relief to the companies (roughly \$300 million over five years) and some extra adjustment aid for hard-hit communities. Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin's arguments had won out: The United States won't do anything to stir up protectionism.

However, U.S. global policies, including support for the International Monetary Fund, helped to create and worsen the Asia crisis that led to the steel industry's problems in the first place. And the IMF bailouts haven't hesitated to protect banks against losses from the crisis. But when it comes to protecting a domestic industry and workers from cataclysmic events beyond everyday competition, the administration is extremely cautious, even though experience suggests much of the damage will not be reversed after the crisis is over. Ultimately, steel workers will have to pay with their livelihoods and communities to save the banks and protect the global free market. Meanwhile, a corporate raider who hands out millions in political donations can make hundreds of millions more at the expense of poor banana workers he either displaces or abuses. Maybe it's not just Washington that's becoming a banana republic. Maybe it's the whole world. ■

## IMPEACH BILL CLINTON FOR THE RIGHT REASONS: NOT FOR LEWINSKY, BUT RATHER FOR THE ILLEGAL BOMBING OF IRAQ, AFGHANISTAN AND SUDAN

We the undersigned historians, social scientists and others strongly oppose the removal of Bill Clinton for the offenses for which he is on trial before the Senate. We urge his impeachment for high crimes and misdemeanors, and abuses of presidential power on the following grounds pertaining to the bombings of Iraq, Afghanistan and Sudan:

- **Violation of the War Powers Clause of the Constitution (Article I, Section 8)**
- **Violation of the War Powers Resolution of 1973 (50 U.S.C.A. Sec. 1541-1548. Sec. 2(c))**
- **Violation of the Executive Order prohibiting assassination, or conspiracy to assassinate (Exec. Order 12,333, Sec. 2-305; see also US Army Field Manual 27-10 (1956))**
- **Violation of treaties (UN Charter) which are “the supreme law of the land” (Article VI, Section 2)**

Jesse Lemisch, John Jay College of Criminal Justice/CUNY

Joanne Landy

Rosalyn Baxandall, SUNY College/Old Westbury

Eileen Boris, University of Virginia

Francis A. Boyle, University of Illinois College of Law

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Others wishing to sign this should contact Jesse Lemisch, 890 West End Ave., 8B, New York, NY 10025. (212) 222-6649. (utopia1@ibm.net)





# Common Ground

## Steelworkers and environmentalists team up to fight corporate greed

By Christine Keyser

Last fall, after 3,100 United Steelworkers at Kaiser Aluminum walked out on strike against the company's unfair labor practices, an environmentalist from the California Redwoods drove up to Kaiser's plant in Tacoma, Wash., and hired on as an undercover scab for the union. For Mike Jakubal, a carpenter who runs a portable sawmill in Carberville, it was a rare opportunity to help forge an alliance between environmentalists and Kaiser Steelworkers against a common foe: Houston-based Maxxam Corp., owner of Kaiser Aluminum and Pacific Lumber Company, which has decimated the last privately held ancient redwood forest in California. Jakubal shaved off his beard for the first time in 10 years, donned fire-resistant work clothes, and set to work as a union mole documenting conditions inside the smelter. "They were desperate for people," he says. "If you had a pulse and could stand upright and pass a drug test, you could get a job in there."

Soon after, on a blustery day in early December, a small flotilla of Earth First! vessels braved 40-mile-per-hour gales in Tacoma harbor to blockade the *Sea Diamond*, an Australian

cargo ship carrying 650,000 tons of alumina ore bound for Kaiser's Tacoma smelter. The blockade prevented the ship from docking and shut down the entire Port of Tacoma for the day. From the pier's conveyor belt, the environmentalists hung a huge 40-by-50-foot banner, which—taking a swipe at Maxxam's infamous CEO and principal shareholder Charles Hurwitz—proclaimed: "Hurwitz cuts jobs like he cuts trees."

For years, environmentalists—most notably the late Judi Bari—have been trying to build an alliance with timber workers, recognizing the potential power of a movement in which labor and environmentalists join together against destructive timber bosses. But the timber companies have made the activists scapegoats, successfully blaming them—not overcutting and automation—for job losses.

The unusual alliance with Kaiser Steelworkers has demonstrated that environmentalists can reach beyond concerns of preserving wilderness and embrace working-class struggles. It also has created a foundation for future cooperation against corporations like Maxxam. "For a long time, corporations have been trying to drive a wedge between workers and environmentalists," says Joe Hall, a member of Earth First! who organized the Tacoma blockade. "We want jobs as much as everybody else, but this has been our first chance to prove it."

PHOTO COURTESY INTERNATIONAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD

**I**n one of the country's most heated environmental conflicts, Jakubal and his fellow environmentalists have spent more than a decade fighting Pacific Lumber's devastation of the Headwaters Forest, the largest unprotected ancient redwood forest left on earth. The majestic thousand-year-old coastal redwoods, which grow only in California, once stretched from Big Sur to the Oregon border. Today, barely 3 percent of California's virgin redwoods remain, providing a fragmented but critical habitat for the spotted owl, marbled murrelet, coho salmon and other endangered species.

Maxxam acquired the family-owned Pacific Lumber in 1985 through a hostile takeover and quickly began liquidating Pacific Lumber's vast redwood holdings, tripling the rate of timber cutting to pay off interest on a junk bond debt incurred in the takeover. Under Maxxam's direction, Pacific Lumber instituted clearcutting, slash burning and other destructive logging practices, reducing much of its old growth redwood forests to tree farms. In no time, Hurwitz also raided the \$60 million employee pension fund. "Let me tell you about the 'golden rule,'" Hurwitz told Pacific Lumber workers shortly after the takeover. "He who has the gold rules."

After years of protests and lawsuits from environmentalists, the Clinton administration struck a controversial deal with Hurwitz in 1996 to purchase 7,500 acres of the 60,000-acre Headwaters Forest. As part of the deal, Pacific Lumber has drawn up a disastrous habitat conservation plan to manage the company's 210,000 acres of timber land over the next 50 years. The government, under this plan, would permit Pacific Lumber to kill endangered species and liquidate thousands of acres of critical old growth habitat. Environmentalists bitterly

## ***"We've learned some things from Earth First!, but they've learned some things from us ..."***

oppose the plan, calling it the "Headwaters clearcut plan." Yet federal negotiators, led by Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), have gone ahead with the deal under Maxxam's threat of lawsuits for interfering with its private property.

**I**n 1988, Maxxam gained control of Kaiser Aluminum with \$1 billion of junk bonds secured by infamous insider-trader Michael Milken of Drexel Burnham Lambert (which also financed Maxxam's takeover of Pacific Lumber). Maxxam radically transformed Kaiser, selling \$700 million of its assets to pay off its junk bond debt. Maxxam moved many of Kaiser's unionized operations to right-to-work states like Tennessee with lower prevailing wages and opened nonunion plants. Kaiser also began acquiring aluminum mines, smelters and refining facilities in places such as China, Ghana and Jamaica to take advantage of cheap labor and lax environmental regulations. Kaiser even seriously considered buying Venezuela's aluminum industry last summer, pulling out only when the global financial crisis made the \$400 million venture too risky.

Veterans at Kaiser say that, in the old days, a strike was unthinkable. The company treated its work force fairly, paid high wages and provided lifetime employment. But on September 30, 1998, nearly 3,100 Steelworkers at five Kaiser plants in four states walked off their jobs—for the second time in

three years—when contract negotiations broke down over the company's plan to lay off more than 700 union employees and outsource their jobs to nonunion contractors. The union has filed an unfair labor practices complaint against Kaiser with the National Labor Relations Board, charging the company with bad-faith bargaining.

The union is pushing for increased wages and benefits, which lag well below the industry norm, arguing that Kaiser Steelworkers should be paid on a par with steel workers at Alcoa and Reynolds, the company's two major competitors. The union is also seeking job security for Kaiser workers, seniority protection, improved health and pension benefits and better safety procedures. The Steelworkers are particularly bitter that Kaiser has refused to restore the wage and benefit concessions they voluntarily sacrificed in 1983 to keep the troubled company afloat when it was struggling because of falling aluminum prices. In lieu of their wages, Kaiser put part of the Steelworkers' salaries into an employee stock plan, which has paid no interest or dividends in the past 15 years.

Despite reaping record profits of \$168 million and achieving record performance at all five striking plants in 1997, Kaiser has refused to increase wages and benefits. Indeed Kaiser, which owns two plants in Spokane and one in Tacoma (the other strikers are in Ohio and Louisiana), was the second most profitable company in Washington state in 1997—behind only Microsoft—earning more than even Boeing, Seattle's largest employer. The average Kaiser Steelworker earns \$600 a week, or \$14.65 an hour. In contrast, Kaiser CEO George Haymaker takes home an \$18,000 paycheck each week.

Kaiser officials contend that the company needs to take drastic measures to compete against Alcoa and Reynolds, which have larger, modernized facilities and greater financial resources and access to capital. "Kaiser competes in a global industry that is intensely competitive," company spokesman Scott Lamb says. "By almost any financial measure the company badly lags behind its competitors." Lamb points out that Kaiser's 17 percent gross profit margin was the lowest in the industry last year, compared with Alcoa's 25 percent and Reynolds' 18 percent.

But Hurwitz's leveraging has put Kaiser Aluminum heavily in debt, and its stock has plunged to \$5.50 per share since the strike began. Meanwhile, Maxxam and Hurwitz are being sued by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. and the Office of Thrift Supervision for the \$1.6 billion taxpayer bailout in 1988 of the failed United Savings of Texas, a Maxxam-controlled savings and loan. The FDIC is seeking \$250 million in claims against Maxxam and the OTS is seeking another \$500 million. (The Oakland-based Rose Foundation has proposed a debt-for-nature swap to trade Pacific Lumber's entire 60,000-acre Headwaters Forest to the government in exchange for writing off Maxxam's alleged S&L debt.)

Kaiser spent \$8 million preparing for the current strike, advertising for replacement workers weeks before the contract expired. The company hired IMAC, a strikebreaking outfit from Ohio, to keep the plants staffed and running. IMAC housed the strikebreakers in trailers outside the plants and fed them gourmet meals of lobster, crab legs and trout stuffed with wild rice, Jakubal reports.



Nonetheless, production at all five plants has fallen sharply, the quality of the aluminum produced has deteriorated and workplace injuries have soared as untrained strikebreakers bused in from around the country—mostly young black and Latino men—have replaced highly skilled union Steelworkers. In the first two weeks of the strike, 29 injured replacement workers at Kaiser's Mead plant in Spokane were hospitalized. Kaiser was fined twice by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration for safety violations in October at the Tacoma smelter. And the strike suffered its first fatality in early January, when a replacement worker at Kaiser's plant in Newark, Ohio,

## Steelworkers know how to stage a campaign that brings corporations around. Eventually we'll win."

was impaled on a forklift. Accidents are inevitable, Jakubal says, since replacement workers are given just one day of safety training to adjust to a hazardous workplace.

Steelworkers leaders charge that Kaiser is seeking to bust the union at the five plants before 2001, when it plans to merge with the United Auto Workers and Aerospace and Machinists unions, increasing their collective bargaining strength. Lamb disputes that Kaiser is engaging in union-busting tactics and insists that the company has negotiated in good faith with the union. He also denies that Hurwitz and Maxxam are calling the shots at Kaiser. Yet Pacific Lumber sent at least 60 of its employees to work as scabs at the two plants in Spokane, union officials charge, lodging them in motels at Maxxam's expense. Jon Gilliam, who has worked at Kaiser's Tacoma plant for 10 years, says the company offered him \$3 more per hour if he resigned his union membership and crossed the picket line. "They were banking on a lot of union members resigning," he says. "They underestimated the strength of the union." So far, only 25 union members at the five Kaiser plants have crossed the picket line.

In early December, three busloads of striking Kaiser workers traveled to Pacific Lumber's headquarters in Scotia, Calif., to urge the timber workers not to work as strikebreakers. The timing was crucial since Pacific Lumber had laid off 180 workers a few weeks earlier, after the California Department of Forestry suspended its timber operations for violating state forestry laws. (Pacific Lumber has wracked up 300 violations since 1995.) Managers at Pacific Lumber, a nonunion shop, locked the workers in during lunch and made them work overtime to prevent them from talking to the striking Kaiser workers. Some Pacific Lumber workers quietly approached Steelworkers and asked them to assist them in forming a union of their own, and the union plans to send in an organizing team early this year. "There's a great deal of repression," says David Foster, a union regional director. "People were very afraid to be seen talking directly with Steelworkers members. But in private they sought our people out and had good talks. Generally there was a very warm reception."

A few days later, the environmentalists shut down the Port of Tacoma. The Steelworkers later repaid the environmentalists for their help by showing up at a demonstration outside of Plum Creek Timber Company in Seattle with signs reading, "United Steelworkers support environmentalists." Union members also submitted 1,000 written comments to the U.S.

Fish and Wildlife Service last fall against Pacific Lumber's habitat conservation plan and addressed rallies opposing the plan in Oakland and Eureka. The union staunchly opposes the federal and state plans to pay Maxxam a total of \$480 million for portions of the Headwaters Forest because it would give the company a war chest to outlast the Kaiser strike. "I told people when you're dealing with someone like Hurwitz there's no such thing as a labor issue or an environmental issue," Jakubal says. "The basis for working together is a mutual trust and a common enemy."

The alliance began after Steelworkers discovered a "Jail Hurwitz" Web site ([www.jailhurwitz.com](http://www.jailhurwitz.com)) put together by Earth First!'s Darryl Cherney. In turn, Cherney visited

striking workers last fall in Spokane and Gramercy, La., to rally support. "This is a very critical alliance for the entire country," Cherney says. "Unions and environmentalists are basically branches off the same tree. That tree is united against corporate greed. We strengthen each other's movements by sharing information."

Having found some common ground, the environmentalists and Steelworkers are plotting future actions. They have pinpointed workplace pollution and the export of trees and other natural resources as areas of mutual concern. The alliance has bolstered the Steelworkers' demands for a fair contract and fortified their determination to outlast the strike. At the same time, it has given the environmentalists a powerful working-class ally and lent them credibility in their struggle against Maxxam. "We've learned some things from Earth First!, but they've learned some things from us, because the Steelworkers know how to stage a campaign that brings corporations around," says Rob Lalicker, a union officer in Tacoma. "Eventually, we'll win." ■

Christine Keyser is an environmental writer in Berkeley, Calif.

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THUNDER'S  
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# Walking in the City

By James B. Goodno

**A**rchitecture is the most public and essential of our arts. Even the most reclusive among us cannot avoid almost daily encounters with the structures and landscapes

**Sidewalk Critic: Lewis Mumford's Writings on New York**  
 Edited by Robert Wojtowicz  
 Princeton Architectural Press  
 279 pages, \$27.50

designed by men and women. Whether our home is urban, suburban or rural, our human environment exists at the intersection of nature and architecture. Thus it's a shame that our culture so obscures intelligent architectural criticism with the banal sort of house and garden writing best exemplified by the empire that is Martha Stewart, and the celebration of individual wealth and personal extravagance that fills what passes for a popular architectural press.

The reviews collected in *Sidewalk Critic: Lewis Mumford's Writings on New York* are a reminder of the importance of high-quality architectural criticism. From 1931 to 1963, Mumford contributed engaging,

enlightening and frequently funny commentaries on the built environment to *The New Yorker*. In *Sidewalk Critic*, Mumford's literary executor, art historian Robert Wojtowicz, has collected an outstanding sampling of the writer's work from his first decade with the magazine.

Packaged alongside a pair of autobiographical essays and a small number of art reviews are 51 short architecture reviews. These reviews are frequently merciless: "I cannot think of anything about the building to praise," Mumford wrote of a new bank building, "except the back stairs, which are just stairs, and the blue carpet, which is a nice blue." Even the recently deceased did not escape his scathing pen. While condemning a posthumously completed Cass Gilbert federal building, Mumford considers—in one sentence—the architect's entire career and concludes, "He will probably go down in history as one of the worst monumental architects America has produced."

Despite his sharp tongue, Mumford's work was informed by a genuine humanism and a strong belief that architecture should create an environment for joyful living. In New York, Mumford observed a chaotically shaped city that combined a small number of wonderful parks, a decent transportation system and a vibrant street life with wretched slums, hideous examples of public architecture and nasty industrial sites. Like many of the progressive planners and architects of his day, Mumford envisioned an orderly city filled with light, spacious living and work quarters and abundant open space.

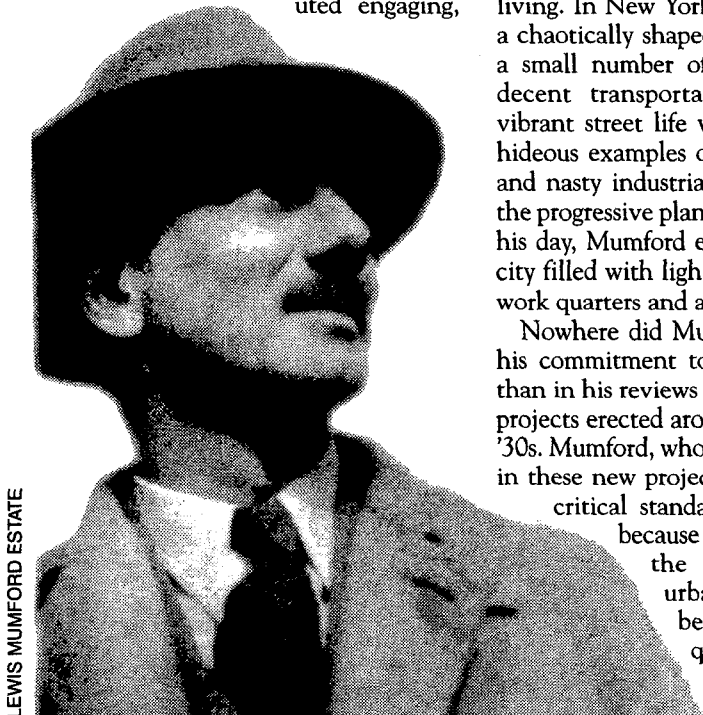
Nowhere did Mumford better express his commitment to improving the city than in his reviews of the public housing projects erected around New York in the '30s. Mumford, who found much to cheer in these new projects, did not lower his critical standards for them simply because they were built for the poor. Low-income urbanites, Mumford believed, deserved quality housing in decent surroundings. He harshly criti-

cized buildings that condemned the poor to life in dark, ill-ventilated rooms and praised those projects that approached his ideal of relatively low-density islands in a sea of green space. In spirit, Mumford was clearly a predecessor of today's socially and environmentally concerned architects and planners.

**U**nfortunately, Mumford's framework was deeply flawed. In today's context, many of his prescriptions seem at best quaint and at worst dangerous. The author paired a deep distaste for the congestion and dreariness of Victorian-era city houses and neighborhoods with a false belief that the U.S. population was leveling off. This led to some of his biggest mistakes.

In criticizing Norman Bel Geddes' design for the city of the future at the 1939 World's Fair, for example, Mumford belittled the notion that the city of 1960 would be larger than the city of 1940. He snippily wrote off Geddes' desire to keep workers' housing within walking distance of factories, arguing that the automobile properly allowed for the location of working-class neighborhoods several miles away from job sites. Mumford's ideal city contained lower-density housing and few tall buildings (especially tall apartment buildings).

In the articles collected here, Mumford frequently confused density—the number of units or bedrooms per acre—with congestion, the number of people per unit. He favored low-rise buildings—two to three stories where possible, four to six as a compromise—over high rises. He approved closing off roads and forcing traffic to travel around rather than through residential neighborhoods, and orienting housing units to landscaped greenspace rather than the street. Although he did not drive, he endorsed the construction of landscaped highways around and into the city to speed the motorist's escape from urbanity. The removal of streetcars and elevated railroads from city streets cheered Mumford, as did much of the work of New York's controversial parks' commissioner and planning tsar Robert Moses, whose large-scale projects included zoos in Central and Prospect parks, slum clearances and a network of inner-city expressways that sliced through neigh-



LEWIS MUMFORD ESTATE



Lewis Mumford (left) derided bad architecture wherever he saw it. Despite his faith in the promise of the automobile, for example, he ridiculed the "veracious formlessness" of sprawl foretold at the 1939 World's Fair (right).



hoods and dumped thousands of cars onto city streets.

Today's progressive planners, architects and urbanists dispute the principals behind many of Mumford's arguments. Increasing the intensity of commercial and industrial developments, building higher-density residences oriented to the street and favoring public conveyance over the private automobile are part of a reasoned response to suburban sprawl and the breakdown of community. In her provocative 1961 classic, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs properly criticized Mumford and his fellow veterans of the Regional Plan Association of New York of the '20s as "decentrists" who sought to "decentralize great cities, thin them out, and disperse their enterprises and populations into smaller, separated cities, or better yet, towns."

Bits and pieces of the decentrist framework surface throughout Mumford's writings in the '30s with the viewpoint best summarized in a brief review of Frank Lloyd Wright's Broadacre City. Wright, America's foremost architect following the death of Louis Henri Sullivan in 1924, designed a model city where each family lived in private homes on large lots and owned a private car. Mumford praised this vision, calling it "the new type of city that the motorcar and the autogiro have made possible."

To be sure, neither Mumford nor Wright would look approvingly on the hackneyed architecture that dominates our suburban landscape. Wright was too talented and Mumford too insistent on honest, functional design and top-quality craftsmanship to fall for the quickly constructed and often unattrac-

tive structures that dominate the suburbs. Their common view of land usage, however, serves as an unfortunate antecedent to the suburban-oriented, automobile-driven development pattern that came to dominate the landscape in postwar America. Given their influence, it's not unfair to hold them partly responsible for this outcome.

**Lewis Mumford envisioned a garden city of light, but wrongly predicted the car would help get us there.**

If Mumford the social critic comes up short in history's eye, the same cannot be said of Mumford the critic of individual buildings. Here he reveals a critic not caged in by his own preferences but one who was guided by a sharp intelligence, fine sense of aesthetics and deep, confident knowledge of his subject.

In general, Mumford abhorred the skyscraper and the chaotic, unplanned development that characterized its emergence. Yet the New York skyline enticed him as it beguiled many others, and he could write positively of high rises that he found well-scaled, cleanly designed and soundly constructed. His opinion,

too, was not set in stone. In the early '30s, for example, Mumford wrote biting, critical reviews of the rising Rockefeller Center—the planned conglomeration of buildings and plazas that includes the towering R.C.A. Building, Radio City Music Hall and several others—yet by decade's end he surprised himself by liking the finished product. (Although he did still want to slice

close to 40 stories from the 70-story R.C.A. tower.)

Some of Mumford's more enjoyable reviews were of smaller commercial buildings. These fit Mumford's vision of properly scaled urban buildings, allowing him to focus on details of design and construction and draw attention to the shape and size of windows, the type and merit of building materials, the appropriateness or inappropriateness of decorative features and the quality of construction. Less burdened by social analysis that seems misplaced today, these essays reveal Mumford at his most timeless.

Yet it is Mumford's vision of architecture as a public art and potential social good that gives his work true lasting purpose. Despite his flaws, he remains a far more satisfying read than most of today's writers on architecture, especially those contributing to the popular press. Mumford wanted to make New York and other cities better places for humans to live and work in. The problems he attacked were real. And if the solutions he proposed no longer seem appropriate, they remain a valuable entry point for those interested in discussing and constructing a better urban environment. Mumford contributed a strong and eloquent voice to an important conversation on the shape of the places we live. We could use more such voices today. ■

James B. Goodno is the editor of *Urban Ecology*, a quarterly magazine of architecture, planning and urban affairs.

# State of the Union

By Kevin Mattson

A few years ago, Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam published a now famous essay called "Bowling Alone." What followed was a rare occurrence in academic life. Major newspapers and magazines across America reported on the piece. Then the unimaginable happened: Putnam's face was splashed across the cover of *People* magazine. Suddenly, the corporate media seemed to take seriously some pretty serious ideas.

Putnam found that increasing numbers of Americans bowl not in leagues but by themselves. So *what?* you might ask. Well, from this and other evidence, he extrapolated that a larger civic crisis is bubbling up in America. Voluntary associations—where citizens affiliate with one another freely, collectively solve community problems and build networks of social trust—have declined. Participation in public life is plummeting. Americans, Putnam and his supporters argue, no longer practice self-government or democracy.

Debates have swirled around Putnam's arguments. Among his most recent critics is Michael Schudson, a sociologist at the University of California, San Diego. In his book *The Good Citizen*, Schudson debunks some of the implicit (and explicit) nostalgia lingering in the debate about America's current civic crisis. Those who fear for America, he argues, inevitably adopt a story of decline by contrasting the supposedly robust civil society and public participation of the past with the allegedly couch-potato present.

Unfortunately, the past holds out no glorious tales, Schudson writes. During colonial times, for instance, few citizens participated rigorously in public life; they simply deferred to aristocratic gentleman who led the way. Even during the 19th century, when voter turnout and mass participation in political life reached the highest rates ever, politics served mostly as entertainment. Citizens attended political debates (most famously the lengthy ones between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas), but as Schudson makes clear, these were the

only shows in town. Without other sources for fun, Americans turned to politics not out of a sense of civic good but to have a good time.

When examining the 19th century, Schudson rightfully questions the current vogue of Alexis de Tocqueville, whose *Democracy in America* is a revered classic

## **The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life**

By Michael Schudson

The Free Press

400 pages, \$27.50

## **Citizen Competence and Democratic Institutions**

Edited by Stephen Elkin and Karol

Edward Soltan

Penn State University Press

400 pages, \$19.95

in political analysis. Thinker after thinker today pays attention only to the sunny side of Tocqueville's portrayal of 19th century America. Schudson points out that Tocqueville was not so one-sided. Tocqueville praised America's system of voluntary associations, but he also depicted America's citizens as "absorbed in private life ... obsessed with their own material advancement and likely to shun general ideas, philosophy, the arts, or politics itself." The recent Tocqueville mania (first broadcast on C-SPAN, then promoted by Fox pundit Michael Barone) forgets that this thinker would have thought twice before endorsing 19th century America as a model of civic engagement.

It's not as if things get better when Schudson turns to the 20th century. He follows (a bit too simply) the interpretation of most historians in his treatment of Progressive Era reformers. Focusing their rage against corruption, these activists struggled for civil service reform and, ironically, defeated the one institution that ensured mass participation—the political party of yesteryear. Though Schudson criticizes other thinkers' nostalgia, in his reading of the Progressive Era he betrays his own, when he argues that, in their successful triumph over patronage and smoke-filled rooms, reformers "sanitized politics." Challenging

the idea that politics was entertainment (in the form of parades and boozy gatherings of party loyalists), reformers created a "new model of citizenship that made it both more difficult and less interesting to be a 'good citizen.'"

Schudson's critique of other thinkers' nostalgia, though, often hits the mark. Unfortunately, in debunking the past, he goes too far in defending contemporary political culture. He too quickly embraces the "rights revolution," the fact that, since 1965, more and more citizens—African-Americans, women and gays—have demanded the courts protect their rights, making the legal system central to political struggle. For Schudson, "the rights-regarding citizen" has helped "enhance democracy." A whole host of communitarian critics (on the left and right) will pounce on him for this statement—arguing that "rights talk" is a demand for privacy and unfettered individualism, not entrance into the demands of democratic public life.

More troublesome is that "rights talk" leads Schudson to stretch the already elastic category of politics until it becomes amorphous. He conceptualizes those who simply demand respect in everyday life as political actors. "They do politics when they walk into a room, anyone's moral equals, and expect to be treated accordingly," he writes. "Others do politics when they wear a 'Thank You for Not Smoking' button." Pretty soon, you're left wondering what *isn't* political.

And Schudson doesn't play by his own rules. He criticizes others for not providing evidence for their claims, but he doesn't tone down his own unsubstantiated statements on contemporary politics. For example, he argues in sweeping terms that "a rights-regarding citizenship ... automatically implies respect for rights of others and the willingness to engage in public dispute according to public norms and a public language." Words like "automatically" should make any reader cringe; especially in this case, when some rights clearly jeopardize the respect for others' rights (my right to be taxed "fairly," for example, can cancel out some kid's right to a worthy public education). Nor does Schudson pay attention to the underbelly of a litigious society. When politics is displaced into the legal realm (a perfect example being the Ken Starr investigation), public



debate is often closed to anyone besides the lawyers who know the technicalities of the law and who very often eschew any talk of values and politics.

In the end, Schudson shrugs his shoulders at what others believe is a crisis in democracy. Unfortunately, one can't divorce Schudson's lackadaisical attitude from his lackadaisical thinking. When he argues that an increased distrust of public institutions can reflect a healthy democratic attitude on the part of critically minded citizens, he doesn't pay enough attention to how it can also reflect a cynicism toward—and rejection of—public life. Though he is correct to argue that the media do not control the public mindset, he underestimates their influence and power in our political culture. He embraces political "realism" and upholds a "monitorial" form of citizenship whereby citizens simply "scan (rather than read) the informational environment" in order to keep up with political changes that affect them. Unfortunately, he never provides a convincing case that the cynicism and distrust he downplays hasn't done away even with his own provisional and tapered conception of citizenship.

In contrast, the political scientists and theorists gathered together in *Citizen Competence and Democratic Institutions* spell out a deep concern for the current state of democracy. For many of them, Schudson's "monitorial citizenship" ignores the deeper challenges of democratic life. They argue that citizenship based on a "morality of care" and "public spiritedness" is crucial for democracy and that citizens must be prepared to engage in collective endeavors and deliberation about their political future. As Brown University's Nancy Rosenblum points out in an impressive essay, individual rights matter less than a culture that encourages respect and equality among its members in daily interactions. Civic spiritedness needs to be nurtured if democracy is to work. From all of these writers' perspectives, more is needed than just self-interested, rights-minded and monitorial citizenship.

Because of this, many of them believe Americans must create places where citizenship skills (what they call competencies) can develop. Democracy demands vigilance and

"asks a good deal of ordinary citizens." So, to galvanize the participation of citizens, the University of Texas' James Fishkin discusses deliberative polling, a process that gathers people together to deliberate about political issues and gain a better understanding in the process. Vermont-based Frank Bryan defends the discussions held in his home state's town meetings. Harry Boyte of the University of Minnesota calls for re-energizing the tradition of "public work," whereby citizens create things for public use (such as parks) as they did in the days of the Civilian Conservation Corps. And John Gaventa widens this call for more democracy to include a "variety of places where democratic discussion and analysis can freely occur—community organizations, popular-education centers, literacy classes, workers' schools."

There's one simple reason why those who argue for a more vigilant sense of civic engagement should win out over Schudson's lax ideas. Though the

decline in public participation is a general and undeniable trend, it's the poor who don't participate the most. At his best, Schudson argues that we shouldn't get on a moral high horse about those who abdicate civic responsibility (especially, it should be mentioned, because many people don't have the time since they are working longer hours just to get by). But there's still obvious reason to be concerned with civic decline. When citizens don't feel engaged in public life, they leave political affairs to an elite—the lobbyists, politicians and "inside the beltway" cronies. The voices of regular citizens—including the disenfranchised—fail to shape our public and political discourse, and citizenship itself becomes hollow. That's the standard fare of American politics today. And that's why we should care about the demise of democracy. ■

Kevin Mattson is the author of *Creating a Democratic Public: The Struggle for Urban Participatory Democracy During the Progressive Era*.

**Aztec Warrior** by Jesus Helguerra, from *La Patria Portátil: 100 Years of Mexican Chromo Art Calendars*, now on exhibit at Chicago's Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum until April 25 and later traveling to Los Angeles, San Francisco and Mexico City. Calendar art, a hallmark of Mexican popular culture since the late 1800s, had developed a fiercely nationalistic style by the revolutionary 1920s, glorifying the country's indigenous history. Part of the broader *Mexicanidad* movement, the popular calendars have helped to shape Mexican national consciousness.





The young Du Pré sisters in *Hilary and Jackie*, which explores their bitter sibling rivalry.

# All in the Family

By Pat Aufderheide

There are a bunch of ways to go wrong making a movie about a female artist. There's the tortured-genius angle, the unnatural woman thing, and, of course, the *Lifestyles of the Gifted and Talented* approach. In *Hilary and Jackie*, director Anand Tucker (a veteran of British TV and first-time indie director) and screenwriter Frank Cottrell Boyce (who wrote the memorable *Welcome to Sarajevo*) flirt with all three. In the end, though, they make something that's a bit bigger and better, a film that waltzes you out of your little life, but that you can recall the next day without embarrassment.

The true story lends itself to an emotionally gaudy treatment. English cellist Jacqueline Du Pré had a meteoric career in the '60s, dazzling audiences from an early age with her flamboyant and sensual performances. With her husband, fellow musician Daniel Barenboim, she became global musical royalty. Suddenly, at the peak of her career, her already unpredictable behavior became wildly erratic; she was later diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and died at the age of 42. Years later, her sister Hilary and brother Piers published a tell-all biography. It combined the easy elements of

tabloid coverage: victimhood (mostly theirs, for standing in the shadow of genius) and shock value (mostly hers, not only for sleeping with her sister's husband, but convincing everyone it was therapeutic).

*Hilary and Jackie* follows the facts of the story, while building its drama around the intense interdependence and rivalry between the two sisters. (Piers is a walk-on in the movie version.) The filmmakers take the tale out

**Hilary and Jackie**  
Directed by Anand Tucker

**Children of Heaven**  
Directed by Majid Majidi

of easy categories with a daring, and often successful, narrative strategy. They split the film into two parallel tales. The first part of the film basically belongs to Hilary (Australian actress Rachel Griffiths); a child prodigy outshone in adolescence by her brilliant but arrogant sib, she retreats like a wounded animal into an idyllic, rural home and family life with husband Kiffer (David Morrissey).

By the time Jackie's side of the story

unspools (Emily Watson's impressive performance has won her a Golden Globe nomination), we have a well-cultivated resentment of her. Taken inside her peculiar world, however, we see that what her family perceives as prima-donna behavior is, for her, a desperate protective shell around the loneliness and terror of being a "trained freak." At Christmas one year, for example, while Jackie is off being grand on several continents, the family gets a package, their first communication in quite a while. It's Jackie's dirty clothes, and they're understandably affronted. Later, we see Jackie in a strange hotel room, dizzy with dislocation, unable to communicate with the hotel staff even to tell them to do her laundry, until, hysterical, she bundles it up for mom, visible evidence of her vulnerability.

This is not a subtle film. It revels in the excesses of '70s celebrity life, and it puts the family's sexual sharing at the center of the sisters' dynamic. The music is, as you might expect, a lead player in the drama, with swelling tides of classical music aurally engulfing the characters. The last scene features a spectacularly spiraling camera tracking the two sisters as young girls on an imaginary, dreamlike beach. You would never know from its wide-screen gestures that this was a pinchpenny-budget independent film.

The counterpointing of the two sisters' stories, right up to Jackie's final days, gives poignance to what might have been simply melodramatic. That narrative seesaw keeps us from cheap conclusions about heroes and victims; we're often given the task of revising earlier understandings. By the end, the relationship between Hilary and Jackie has a credibility that makes it take up residence in your mind.

Strange things are happening to the local cineplex, as both the number of screens and the available films multiply. In fact, the range of product in commercial theaters may never have been so wide. *Hilary and Jackie*, which won its patina of approval at the Toronto International Film Festival, is



now before U.S. audiences in cineplexes thanks to Universal's subsidiary October Films. At the same time, Miramax (a Disney subsidiary with a hefty bankroll from its action films) is launching *Children of Heaven*, a high-quality example of possibly the most interesting film trend of the '90s, Iranian neorealism. Like many Iranian films, this one is told through the eyes of children, a gambit that can allow a director some latitude for social criticism and that can also lead to mawkish sentimentality. Veteran director Majid Majidi is not shy in plucking the heartstrings, but he is a surprisingly bold commentator on social inequality.

As the film opens, 11-year-old Ali is doing the shopping for his ailing mother when he accidentally loses his little sister's newly repaired shoes. The boy and his little sister, afraid to tell their long-suffering parents, share a single pair of sneakers—a strategy fraught with peril. Just when they're both fed up with making do, Ali enters

a kids' marathon in which third prize will be a new pair of sneakers.

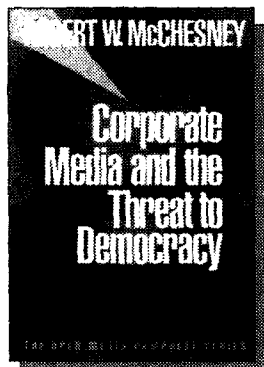
This spare but sturdy little plot lets Majidi do two things he does well. He observes the daily life of a big city (here, Tehran) with the passionate investment of the young. Scenes as simple as a child's walk home from school or a playground interaction are filled with delight, anguish and suspense. As well, Majidi does not stop where many directors in this genre do, with the poignant depiction of poverty. He boldly contrasts Tehran's poor with its rich.

Working with borrowed tools and hope, Ali and his father attempt to sell their gardening services in the lavish neighborhoods, where guard dogs bark behind iron gates and every home is a palace; they might as well be in a foreign country. When Ali arrives at the marathon, he sees the advantages of wealth—the SUVs, the moms in their jogging clothes, the petulant prep school kids—with the x-ray eyes of the young.

Given Iranian censorship—no politics, no religious disrespect and certainly no females without head scarves, even if they're little children—you'd think Majidi would get in trouble. In fact, even with a good track record, he did have difficulty getting money for this government-backed film. It was eventually made by the same children's research institute that backed his better-known countryman Abbas Kiarostami's early films. Now it's too successful to even think of suppressing: The film became a runaway box office hit in Iran, and was also shown to thousands of Iranian schoolchildren before becoming a darling of the international festival circuit.

Majidi has taken a form that threatens to become a cliché—the innocent child's implicit indictment of what adults take for granted—and given it a fresh spin. For those just coming to Iranian cinema and for veteran viewers alike, *Children of Heaven* is a welcome alternative at the cineplex to, say, *Virus* or *Varsity Blues*. ■

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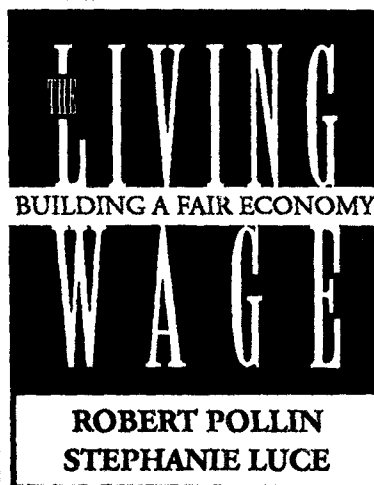


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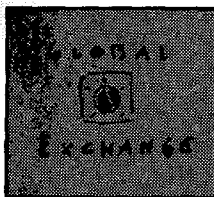
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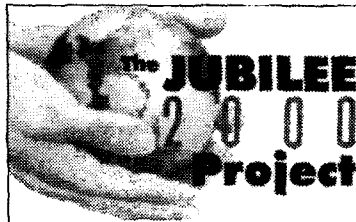
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Continued from page 80

## the interview

*How did Evita originate?*

In 1978-79, there was a *coup d'état*. John Vorster was brought down and P.W. Botha took over. They were stealing government money. Now it's called policy; then it was called scandal. Wonderful things were happening in politics, absurd things. By then I'd been banned so often they wouldn't perform my plays, so someone had given me a little column in a Sunday newspaper. There was so much happening that no one could write about because of censorship. I thought we could not waste these huge appalling things, so I created the wife of a Nationalist member of parliament who, once a month, in the column, would say at a party in Pretoria, "Darling, have you heard?" Then out would come all the things that I had heard. Nobody stopped us.

After two years of using this character, somebody said: "This woman you write about in your column is a real Evita of Pretoria." The musical had just come out; I read the story of Evita Peron and thought, now that's a blueprint for this new creature who was slowly forming herself in answer to the public demand.

*Did the repression, which stopped you as a playwright, lead you to your true vocation?*

I'd started writing plays when I was in London in 1970. Then I went back to work in the Space Theatre in Capetown where I wrote, acted and directed—everything. It was the greatest training in the world. My first South African play was banned. But they didn't ban it outright, because the Space had quite a lot of international attention. They said that I could do the play in the Space's theater but not outside. The moment I moved it outside they banned the script. Just the script. Six weeks later I had a new play called *Carnival*, which they banned outright, but the script was available. So I had a play you could read but not see, and a play you could see but not read.

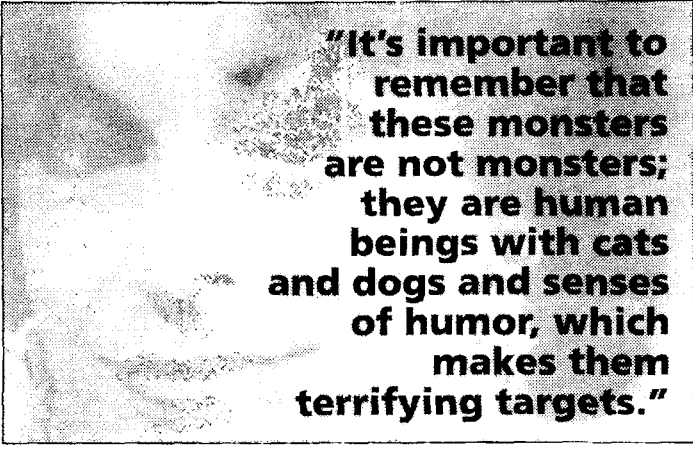
People said, "You little Communist. You're anti-Afrikaner." My father threw me out of the house. Then he was offered a place on the board of censors. After a month, he said: "You know, these people are absolute idiots; they don't know what they are doing. They are senile old farts. They are destroying movies by cutting them." Slowly we started coming together on this: Then I realized that the way to fight these bastards was to make fun of them.

The wonderful thing that my father taught me was not to be obvious with four-letter words. Afrikaners can't bear "fuck"; they can't bear "God." They don't really mind the truth. I would use "fart" to make them cross, but that was counterproductive. My father would say, "Why are you always so obvious? Don't always put your finger in my eye. Within five minutes I want to hit you. Why don't you just tickle me on my shoulder and then behind my ear? Then, when I'm having a nice time, I turn round and my eye finds your finger!" Great advice.

When the apartheid era came to an end, I thought, that's it. But I can never plan for Evita, I can only wait for politics to lead the way. If [Mandela's successor] Thabo Mbeki appoints her ambassador to North Korea, that's where she has to go. I haven't got a choice. As soon as we got the new government in 1994, I tried to get Evita into bed with them through my television series. Nelson Mandela spoke to her like a lady, and each one of those politicians treated her without any sense of irony. Even Pik Botha looked at her with lust in his eyes.

*Did they think they could play at last?*

Ah, play. The fact that Evita doesn't exist means that whatever happens around her doesn't exist either. When I wrote a book, *A Part Hate, A Part Love*, the publisher was concerned about how libelous it was. The day it was published, Evita sued me for libel. We did everything right. There was a press conference at the Cotton Hotel, the press came and loved it. Evita was furious, she said, "This is outrageous. It's all lies and libel." Months later I found out that Botha had wanted to sue for libel and his lawyer had to say to him: "Mr. Botha, you must stand in the queue behind Mrs. Bezuidenhout!" It was deliciously anarchic.



**"It's important to remember that these monsters are not monsters; they are human beings with cats and dogs and senses of humor, which makes them terrifying targets."**

She has totally adapted to the new South Africa ("Some of my best friends are black") yet she is still the bitch that she always was. She still says to the little black girl that cooks for her, "You stole the chocolate; you stole the Easter egg. I saved your life when they wanted to hang you." Evita as a liberal is much more dangerous than she is as a racist Afrikaner. When Botha retired she sent flowers to him and his wife on their birthdays—and got cards back, addressed to Evita Bezuidenhout, c/o Pieter-Dirk Uys. Either they think she's real and lives in my house, which is delightfully bizarre, or they just want to play. It's important to remember that these monsters are not monsters; they are human beings with cats and dogs and senses of humor, which makes them terrifying targets.

*How does it feel, working under an ANC government, compared with under apartheid?*

I am doing exactly the same. Then I pushed against a monolith, it was all negative, all I talked about was death. It was the death of everything: of hope; of family; of one's own soul; the death of children. It was the culture of death. This is different. This is the culture of life. It's flawed, it's in a hell of a speed wobble and we're falling off the truck, but it's life. ■

Michael Kustow has been director of the ICA and associate director of the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre. This article was adapted from the British monthly *Red Pepper*. For subscription inquiries, write to 1B Waterlow Road, London N19 5NJ, U.K., or visit <http://www.redpepper.org.uk>.



# Don't Cry for Me,

# Pretoria

**Who is that drag queen invigorating South African democracy?**

**By Michael Kustow**

**I**f politics now collapses into show business, can there be such a thing as political comedy? Is the comic condemned to be no more than the court jester, the licensed fool? After an outrageous line, Frankie Howerd would say: "I jest, I do but jest," and today's comedians might agree that they do little more than jest. Stand-up comedy and television satire are part of the sickness that they purport to cure; the spin doctor and the stand-up are linked by a chain of one-liners.

The recent visit to Britain of a comic artist from an erstwhile brutal and perilous environment sheds light on political humor in general. For 15 years, South Africa's outstanding satirical performer, Pieter-Dirk Uys, sustained a delirious onslaught on the leaders of apartheid and the mindset of its supporters. When Nelson Mandela came to power, Uys called a one-year truce, vowing not to attack the government. After that, he resumed his assault on the gap between rhetoric and reality, on the horrors revealed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and, above all, on the time-servers and trimmers, reassembling their privileges after the political earthquake. "Hypocrisy," Uys says, "is the Vaseline of political intercourse." His loyalty is to the irony of history, the anarchic spirit of contradiction and the shock that convulses an audience.

Throughout, Uys has donned dresses and high heels and paraded his greatest comic creation, a monstrous Afrikaner matron called Evita Bezuidenhout. Under P.W. Botha, Evita

came on as the Nationalist ambassador to a Bantustan—a native reservation boasting fictitious independence—with a name pronounceable only by her. Today, she appears as Mandela's oldest and most caring comrade, dialing him up with bejeweled fingers on her mobile to make sure he takes his bedtime pills. Never less than glamorous in her cocktail ensembles (rapidly adapted to the colors of the ANC flag), Evita makes white South Africans squirm with embarrassment. To others, like the young woman from Soweto I saw blowing gleeful kisses from the stalls of London's Tricycle Theatre, she's a liberating, extravagant, taboo-bending comic queen, who commands joyful allegiance, whatever the color of her skin.

You wouldn't want to be locked in an elevator with such a relentless supremacist, but there's something delightful about the transformation of gentle Mr. Uys into this powerhouse of bigotry. She releases in us a joy in play—but Uys never lets us forget that behind the eyelashes and couture is a complex man: white and gay, son of a Jewish mother who fled Berlin in 1939 for Capetown, and an Afrikaner father. In a country fiercely divided into simple categories, he came onto the stage fully equipped to treat the solemnities of political life with unqualified irreverence. Uys began giving what he called "solo concerts" in theaters because this was the only form the censor couldn't touch—since there was no script.

**An interview with Uys begins on page 29**